



## Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time A February 16, 2020

### ◆ Jesus Raises the Bar on the Pharisees ◆ Sample of Commentary and Faith-Sharing Questions Used in Small Christian Communities

Due to *Our Catholic Appeal*, we do not have time to comment on today's Gospel. We read the short version.

#### SAMPLE COMMENTARY: MATTHEW 5:17-37

Following is the commentary on the long version of today's Gospel (Matthew 5:17-37) prepared for participants in our Small Christian Communities.

Matthew, a Jewish convert to Christianity, is writing to a Christian community made up of mostly Jews and some Gentiles. He seeks to help his fellow Jews to see that Jesus came not to abolish the Law, but to bring it to fulfillment—to purify it and to offer an authentic interpretation of the Law.

Matthew presents Jesus as One who brings the Law to a new level. He shows Jesus *respecting* the Law but also going *beyond* the Law when he says time and again, “*You have heard it said...but I say to you....*” Jesus does to the Law what the “cleaners” have done to Michelangelo's paintings in the Sistine Chapel—removing years of grime to reveal the true beauty and glory of the master's work. Today's Gospel gives us three instances where Jesus purifies the Law and seeks to raise it to a new level.

***Murder, anger and reconciliation.*** Jesus says, “*You teach that murder is wrong. I agree. But have you forgotten that rage and anger, the root causes of murder, are also wrong?*” Jesus wants his listeners to reflect on what provokes the commission of murder. As someone once said, “Murder begins in the seething heart that is not cooled.” Then Jesus proceeds to condemn abusive language and name-calling which flow from an angry heart. This violation of the Law is so bad that it deserves hell. Jesus goes on to say that reconciliation is more important to God than sacrifice. Offering gifts to God is useless if we ignore wounded relationships with family members or friends. In our reconciliation efforts, we must leave no stone unturned.

***Adultery and lust.*** A double standard existed in the Old Testament when it came to fidelity in marriage. In uncovering the true meaning of this commandment, Jesus goes to the heart of the matter by stating that adultery is much more than just physical. It is primarily a matter of the heart. Adultery originates with a lustful thought or look. “The thought is the father of the deed.” By condemning adulterous looks and thoughts towards a woman, Jesus elevates the woman's status to that of her male counterpart. Neither man nor woman should be seen or treated as a sexual object. Jesus is inviting his disciples to view women in a whole new way.

***Divorce.*** This is perhaps the most controversial of the issues addressed in today's Gospel. Over the centuries, various denominations have interpreted Jesus' teaching on divorce in different ways. The fact is that his condemnation of divorce is a monumental step forward since, prior to his time, a husband could divorce his wife for little or no reason. Here, Jesus is saying that divorcing one's spouse is wrong. By doing so, Jesus is giving women a whole new security, and he challenges the men of his day to have a whole new respect for women. Marriage until death is affirmed as the Gospel norm.

***Oaths.*** Considering the ways of the world, it would seem that Jesus' approach is totally impractical when it comes to telling the truth. He exhorts us to simply tell the truth, whatever the circumstance. “*Let your 'yes' mean 'yes' and your 'no' mean 'no.' Anything more is from the evil one.*” We are bound to tell the truth not only when we take an official oath to do so but as our life principle, i.e., consistently and without exception.

Commenting on today's Gospel, William Byron, S.J., writes:

*Let's take these three goals—avoiding anger, abolishing lustful desire, and committing oneself to honest speech—and consider not only how much our personal morality would improve if we adopted them as personal objectives, but also how much better off our world would be if all its inhabitants made these goals their own. The commitment to anger avoidance would*

*mean non-violence in our midst and hence an end to war. The commitment to purity of heart would mean an end to pornography, prostitution, sexual exploitation, and marital infidelity. The commitment to truth-telling would mean integrity in business, government, and all other areas of human interaction. What a social revolution that would be! What a better world we would have!*

(Excerpt from *The Word Proclaimed, A Homily for Every Sunday of the Year; Year A* by William J. Byron, SJ, Copyright © 2013 by William J. Byron. Paulist Press, Inc., New York/Mahawah, NJ. Reprinted by permission of Paulist Press, Inc.)

After reading the Gospel and commentary, participants spend time sharing their thoughts on the three readings. The following are faith-sharing questions used to stimulate sharing on today's readings.

My commentary on all three Sunday readings can be found on our website.

### **SAMPLE FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS**

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what word/s or image/s in the readings caught your attention. Did they comfort or challenge you or touch you in some way?

*The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.*

2. What are some characteristics of a truly wise person?
3. In your opinion, *why* do people use abusive language and name-calling in their conversation? How can this downward trend be avoided?
4. What are some keys to faithfulness in marriage? How does one remain chaste in mind, word and deed in a heavily sexualized culture?
5. What can help us to always speak the truth and avoid saying what we think others want to hear?
6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

During Lent we will have some people joining an existing group or forming a new group for Lent. Perhaps you may be able to call together 5 or 6, 7 or 8 of your friends, neighbors or co-workers to pray on and discuss the following Sunday's readings. If interested, we will be most willing to help you.

## Prayer for One's Home

**Visit, we beseech you, O Lord, this dwelling,  
and drive far from it all snares of the enemy.  
Let your holy angels dwell herein  
to preserve us in peace;  
and let your blessing be upon us forever.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

## **Openness to God's Will**

**Lord, I do not know what to ask of you.  
You alone know what are my true needs.  
You love me more than I myself know how to love.  
Help me to see my real needs which are concealed  
from me.  
I do not ask for either a cross or a consolation;  
I can only wait for you.  
My heart is open to you.  
Visit and help me; cast me down and raise me up.  
I worship in silence your holy will and your  
inscrutable ways.  
I offer myself as a sacrifice to you.  
I put all my trust in you.  
I have no desire other than to fulfill your will.  
Teach me how to pray.  
Pray you yourself in me. Amen.**

- Philaret of Moscow

## **To be Filled with God**

**O Divine One,  
to thee I raise my whole being,  
a vessel emptied of self.  
O accept, gracious God,  
this my emptiness, and so fill me with thyself,  
thy light, thy love, thy life,  
That these thy precious gifts may radiate through me  
and overflow the chalice of my heart into the hearts  
of all those with whom I come in contact this day,  
revealing unto them the beauty of thy joy and  
wholeness and the serenity of thy peace, which  
nothing can destroy. Amen.**

The above prayers are from my book *Treasury of Prayers* which can be found on our website.

Have a blessed week,

*Le Saran*