

Today's Gospel presents very difficult teachings of Jesus which disturbed many people of His time and which also do in our times today. Jesus is telling us in this Gospel that just getting by within the letter of the law is not what He has in mind for His followers. *No*, Jesus is spelling out clearly what He expects of all those who follow Him.

Jesus does not lay down teachings for every situation in life but He asks us to keep a check on our inner attitudes, on our motivations. *Thoughts* are just as important as *actions*. What we say and what we do must express what is in our hearts because our good attitudes will produce sincere actions.

What can we draw from these challenging words of Christ in today's Gospel? According to the Law of God, murder is wrong: yes, says Jesus, but so too is anger. When Jesus says to us, "*Do not get angry*," He is not condemning anger in itself. There are times when we ought to be angry. An unjust situation should make us angry. Anger need not give rise to a lessening of love, much less to hate.

It is when anger flares into violence or hostility that it becomes dangerous. Anger could lead to murder or seriously hurt people either mentally or physically for life. We see this today in spousal abuse or abusive language or road rage or gossip or self-centeredness which can destroy our families, our communities, and our Church. Hostility rather than anger is the real deadly sin. It causes us to act out our anger, and leads to deep resentments, negative attitudes, insults, and gossiping, which are directed at the object of our anger. We may never have killed anyone, but we may have entertained hostile thoughts about them and harboured hostile attitudes towards them.

Jesus is teaching us to look within our hearts because our attitudes precede our actions. Jesus is saying that the real measure of violence in our society is not found in the crime statistics but in all the ways people put people down, despise others, and hold grudges, so that the taking of life could easily become the next step in a world steeped in hate.

If we find ourselves getting angry often, we should look at the cause of our anger. The cause may lie with ourselves. We may be hypersensitive or over-impatient or full of hurt that we have not dealt with. In which case, we have to look at ourselves.

Our resentments and hatreds and anger, even though we hold them in check, violate the two great commandments Jesus taught us when He said: “*You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments*” (Matthew 22:37-40). We are the Light of Christ when we respect human dignity, when we do not engage in personal insult and anger that pervade so much of our society today.

According to the Law of God, adultery is wrong: yes, says Jesus, but so too, a man looking lustfully “*at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his heart,*” for that is, at least in intent, a violation of the other person’s dignity and respect. Jesus’ words are specifically addressed to men but can easily be extended to women. They are a warning to both men and women of the dangers of lustful desires and fantasies.

We may never have committed adultery, but we may have entertained lustful thoughts and desires. Lust of the eye destroys marriages, families and souls Jesus is saying to avoid the infidelity of the heart, for example, by fantasizing and toying with temptation by the viewing of pornography in magazines or on TV or on the Internet.

We are called to a purity of the eye. When it comes to lust, Jesus uses the image of the eye and hand to help us see that we need to remove evil thoughts from our mind. He warns “*it is better for you to lose one of your members than your whole body to go into hell.*” Jesus’ comparisons make the point. Whatever temptation causes you to sin, whatever leads you into sin, whatever it is, get rid of it! It is not worth “*hell*” in the long run. Get rid of the temptation!

Pornography has snared many good Catholic men and women into seemingly hopeless addiction. But God is more powerful than anything in this universe, so we are not without hope as we remember that even when it comes to beating lustful desires, “*with God nothing is impossible*” (Luke 1:37).

According to the Law of God, “*you shall not swear falsely:*” yes, says Jesus, “*do not swear at all*” or use God’s name to persuade people that you are telling the truth. In Jesus’ time, oath-taking sometimes led to untruthfulness because loopholes were created to allow oath-takers to escape their commitment.

Human conversation often becomes a game so that even though we think we know what people are saying, we can't always be sure we know what they mean. Jesus says that our word should be clear and dependable instead of loaded with loopholes, half-truths, crossing our fingers and false lies. If we begin to feel comfortable with our dishonesty, we can easily deceive ourselves as well as others. We may never see the patterns of sin in our lives that are blocking God's love and growth in holiness.

Jesus is calling us to be people of truth, *whose yes means yes, and whose no means no*. Honesty is the lifeblood of our relationship with God and with one another. Relationships grow strong and deep when there is mutual trust.

People, especially those close to us, need to be able to depend on us and believe that what we say is what we mean and what we will do. Without trust, love can be stifled. Our honesty and consistent faithfulness to Gospel standards can be a powerful witness to a world that is skeptical and ready to find hypocrisy among those who profess to be Catholics.

So many people just say, *"Everybody does it."* But we don't have to be like everyone else. We *do* have a choice. Jesus is teaching us that our Catholic identity is defined not only by what we *don't* do, *murder, adultery, false witness*, but by what we *do* do. When we call ourselves followers of Christ, we are saying, in effect, that we will follow the teachings that Christ established. We pray, as we did in the response to today's Psalm, *"Blest are those who walk in the law of the Lord!"*

In today's Gospel, which follows the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches His disciples the deeper understanding and meaning of His challenging words about murder, adultery, and swearing an oath. Jesus describes His mission that He has come to fulfill the law, to reveal its true meaning.

As we continue with today's Mass, let us each look deeply into our hearts and see if we have put God's commandments into our own lives. The author of the *Book of Sirach* offers us this advice on how to live: *If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and they will save you. If you trust in God, you too shall live.*