

Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time  
February 16, 2020  
Fr. Rick Lorenz

### **Reflection**

If you buy an appliance, the first few pages of the user manual are taken up by warnings and cautions. Things like this: "To prevent electric shock and blade exposure, do not use this AC plug with an extension cord, receptacle or other outlet unless the blades can be fully inserted." They go on and on, so we skip the section and take our chances. In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us a stark warning: "Whoever breaks one of the least of the commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven." And just to make sure we know that he's talking to us, he follows up with a lengthy set of cautions. They amplify the Ten Commandments, tell us what God demands, and seem to spell our doom. "Whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to the hell of fire. Truly, I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away." It's tempting to assume that he exaggerates; that we can skip these words. "For the shorter version, omit the parts in brackets." But Scripture is the Word of God. Jesus is telling us what is necessary to behold the face of God: contrition and longing that purge the soul so that only love of God remains. And these come with the faith that he gives us.

Sir 15:15-20  
Ps 119  
1 Cor 2:6-10  
Mt 5:17-37

"Whoever breaks one of the least of the commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven." Clearly we are all in this camp. We've broken many of the commandments and not just the least of them. We've taught others to do the same - even if we didn't mean to - by our example and by our counsel; by what we've done and what we've failed to do. Even a lifetime of striving with the saints leaves us short of the mark. "Whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." There is only one person who kept the Law in its all-embracing detail; there is only one person who ever could. And he fulfilled the law as priest, prophet and king.

As prophet, Jesus fulfilled the law by his divine interpretation. Considered a rabbi by his peers, he offended them. Jesus didn't just propose interpretation as they did, but taught with authority. He picked up the Ten Commandments received on Mount Sinai, and carried them up to the summit, love of God and neighbour, on the Mount of the Beatitudes. He elevated them, raising them from a list of actions commanded and restricted, to words that reach the heart; its secret intentions, its deepest desires; shadows exposed to the light "for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God."

As king, Jesus fulfilled the law by obeying it perfectly. The psalm says, "Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart." Jesus is "the wisdom of the Lord: he is mighty in power and sees everything. He made the law, and it was written on his heart; written in a way that was more than knowledge or understanding. As true God and true man, obedience to the law was his by nature, with a human will perfectly aligned to his divine will. He chose to keep the commandments with the fullest freedom, the truest trust, the liveliest life.

As priest, Jesus fulfilled the law by giving himself as sacrifice; the eternal sacrifice accomplishing once for all what the Day of Atonement could not. The suffering servant even took on the curse of the law by hanging on a tree. But this curse did not condemn but redeem. His death delivered us from sin, made us free, and brings us grace.

The first reading says, "The Lord has placed before you fire and water; stretch out your hand for whichever you choose." We choose both. Our baptism with water anoints us with the fire of the Holy Spirit. He brings us faith in Jesus "called great in the kingdom of heaven," hope that attaches us to him there, and charity that breaks us free of the world, like an acorn sprung to oak reaching for the sky. The Holy Spirit brings us death to self, life according to the will of God, and the certain hope of eternal life to come.

This is life **through** Christ because he made us for love and died for our sins. Life **with** him because he is with us until the end of the age.

Life **in** him because we are his body, the Church. Life **to** him because he is our goal and our salvation. Life **for** him because we are crucified to the world, and remade with righteousness that exceeds.