

## SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR A

### THEME: YOUR VIRTUE MUST GO BEYOND THAT OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

When Jesus began his public ministry, it was obvious that he did not approve many of the things that the religious leaders of his time did and taught. On numerous occasions he had issues with the chief priests, the scribes and the Pharisees on their interpretation of the law and the prophets. The Law and the Prophets constituted the scriptures of the Jewish people, along with the writings.

From the way Jesus was criticizing the interpretation of the Law and the Prophets by the religious leaders of his time, some people, his disciple in particular, might have begun to think that he came to do away with the Law and the Prophets altogether, to abolish them. In our Gospel reading today, Jesus said that he came to do no such thing. Indeed, what he came to do is the very opposite: he came to complete the Law and the prophets; that is, he came to perfect them, to lift their observance to a new and higher level.

The Scribes and Pharisees had a certain kind of goodness, even holiness. Jesus did not condemn the goodness they sought, rather he condemns what they did not have in their hearts. They had no deep spirituality. They governed their thoughts and actions by their external observance of the Jewish Laws and how they appeared in the eyes of others. The love of God and the love of others that flows from our love of God never filled their inner selves, never filled their hearts. Sure, they may not have committed murder, but they allowed themselves to hate. Sure, they may not have committed adultery, but they allowed themselves to regard women merely as objects for the pleasure of men. Wives were merely useful. That attitude adulterates genuine love and demeans women.

Even today, do we consider ourselves to be much better than the Scribes and Pharisees? Do some of us not govern their actions on the basis of what others think of us? Some of us live superficial life; that is life lived on the basis of appearances. Their motivation comes from the external, not internal. This kind of life is shallow and does not come from deep down within us.

Jesus wants his Holy Spirit to dwell deep within us, in our hearts and souls. It is from there that our actions should begin. It is from there that our motives are formed, motives formed in generosity and in the unlimited love and care of God, for our lives, and for others.

Most of us may not commit physical adultery, but who among us has not had lustful thoughts and looked with lust on others? Jesus says, anyone who looks at a woman or a man lustfully is guilty of adultery.

Few of us may have committed perjury while under oath in the court of law. But how many of us have said “yes” when we really didn’t mean it and “no” when we really didn’t mean it? It

used to be the case that when a man gave his word or a woman gave her word, everyone who knew them could rely on them. Living up to one's word was a bond, a contract that everyone could take to be faithful and true. Is that true in our world today?

Few among us may have committed murder, but how many times have we murdered the good name and reputation of others with our idle gossiping and chatting? How many times have we murdered our relationship with others by hateful thoughts of resentment and revenge in our hearts? Our external actions may be nice and polite, but that's not what Jesus really wants from us. He expects more than simple minimums and legal observance of the norms, rules, and laws of living in a social order with others.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus is demanding for something far deeper than legal observance. He wants us to be motivated by love, to live loving lives, to care and to unselfishly give ourselves to others and to God. This is a way of living that no law can motivate or impose on us. This way of living puts greater demand on us. God is interested in what he finds in our hearts. Do we simply obey rules, or do we choose to live in love and concern for others? The answer to this question can only be found down within our hearts.