

FEBRUARY 16, 2020  
Sunday of the 6<sup>th</sup> Week in OT  
Matthew 5: 17, 20-24, 27-28, 33-34, 37

### JESUS FULFILLED THE LAW

In the Church history, Jews were the first Christians. When they adapted the Christian religion, they brought with them their traditions and customs for example, about cleansing, what they need to do with clean and unclean foods, about the attitudes towards women and their relationship with pagans or Gentiles. Then non-Jews or Gentiles became Christians who did not have to observe the traditions of the Jews which was uncomfortable for the Jews. This is the role of Matthew's gospel, which today's gospel reading comes from. This gospel are words of encouragement to the Jewish community.

“Throughout his gospel, Matthew constantly uses the Old Testament to show that the life of Jesus is not a breakaway from past Jewish traditions but that it is a continuation of all that was foretold by the prophecies of the Hebrew Testament. The life and teaching of Jesus is not to be seen as a new religion; Jesus' life is the natural development of the story of salvation. And Jesus is the climax of that story, because Jesus is the Messiah king and saviour for whom the Jews had been waiting for such a long time.”<sup>1</sup> This is the reason why Jesus Christ said in the beginning of our gospel for today: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”<sup>2</sup> This was also the assurance of the Gospel of Matthew to his readers and likewise introduced a new way of thinking and new perspective on the Word of God .

Jesus in our gospel today gives us four striking examples with a new thinking and perspective. To be his authentic disciples, we do not just keep the law through our own

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<sup>1</sup> [www.catholicsermons.com](http://www.catholicsermons.com)

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 5: 17 NRSV Catholic Bible Press USA

behavior but basically through our attitudes and values because we cannot separate our relationship with God and our relationship with people. These four striking examples was discussed by a priest and I would like to quote him directly:

“Do not kill.” The first example from the Law that Jesus gives is, “Do not kill.” But Jesus says we must not even get angry or use insulting words with others. What Jesus is saying is that we must deeply respect the dignity and rights of every person, a person who is unconditionally loved by God and for whom Jesus will sacrifice his life. And if we do not respect our brothers and sisters deep within our heart, we cannot say we respect God. Life and worship cannot be separated: each influences the other. Yet, how often do we piously go to Mass when we have deeply hurt another person and need to reconcile with him or her? We cannot say we love Jesus if we are hurting others. That is the meaning of the sign of peace which we share with others before sharing in the communion. And, where possible, it would be great to make a point of giving the sign of peace sincerely to a person with whom we have a problem, a person we may criticize or dislike, or someone who is a foreigner or a complete stranger. If we cannot do this, we may question the genuineness and integrity of our communion.

Do not commit adultery. Adultery occurs when there are sexual relations between two people, of whom at least one is already married. In Jewish Law there were very serious penalties for this. We remember the woman who was brought to Jesus to be stoned to death, because that was what the Law demanded. Jesus, however, says you can commit adultery in your thoughts (and nobody knows about it – except you). Again, Jesus is saying that, apart from our external actions, our basic attitude is paramount. We cannot just use another person just as an object to give us pleasure. We cannot use another person like a toy. When that happens, both are degraded. Real love and respect is completely different. And adultery is wrong not so much because it is a sexual act outside marriage but because it is an act of serious injustice to the innocent married

partner and seriously injures the marriage relationship. It is a serious breach of trust and fidelity.

No divorce. The Law also says, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.” In Jesus’ time, it was relatively easy to divorce. If a husband became sexually attracted to another woman, he could just make an official declaration that he was divorcing his wife. It could be for very trivial reasons. She could do nothing. She had no say in the matter. It was legal but, according to Jesus, it was against the dignity and the rights of the wife. It was legal but it was both selfish and unjust. It was legal but also immoral. For Jesus, it is not enough for something to be legal. It must also be good. It must also be an expression of love and justice. That is something we need to remember. Immoral acts are not less moral because they do not happen to be against the law or because I am no longer a practising Catholic.

No false swearing. “Don’t swear falsely! Carry out what you vow.” It was common in Jesus’ time for people to guarantee the truth of what they said by making a solemn oath before God. Jesus’ point is that a good Christian does not have to swear at all, because a true Christian is a reliable and totally honest person. He or she is a person of integrity. Such people can be trusted when they speak. They don’t have to give external guarantees. Their ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ means exactly what is said and there are no mental reservations. It is a pleasure to meet people like that, who are totally transparent and have nothing to hide.”<sup>3</sup>

My sisters and brothers, Jesus is fulfilling the Law and giving us a fuller and deeper meaning. We are not just following the law, but we love the law because the One who gave that law is the first one who loved us. God’s knows what is best for us. This is a reminder for us: we follow the law because we love the Lord who made the law. He is

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<sup>3</sup> [www.catholicsermons.com](http://www.catholicsermons.com)

the ultimate example of how to follow that law - the law of love by giving up His life for us and be an obedient Son to the Father. So, if we are His disciples, follow His Law – the Law of love to serve more, to understand more, and to obey more.

Let this be our prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, nurture in me a greater love and respect for your laws and commandments. Give me a flaming aspiration and longing to live a life of honesty, obedience, and holiness. Cleanse my thoughts and intentions that I may only desire what is most pleasing to you and act in accord with your will. Give me strength and help me to understand the weaknesses of others as you understand my own weaknesses. Amen."