

First Reading Sirach 15:15–20
 Psalm 119:1–2, 4–5, 17–18, 33–34
 1 Corinthians 2:6–10
 Matthew 5:20–22a, 27–28, 33–34a, 37

Homily for 6th Sunday of Ordinary Time
 February 12, 2017

Respect the Dignity and the Body

In today's Gospel Jesus says:

“I have not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them”.

What did Jesus mean by this? For the Jewish people of Jesus' time there were three different sets of Laws. Liturgical, ceremonial and moral. Jesus was not referring to the liturgical and ceremonial laws; rather it was the moral law he came to fulfill

Where is the moral law most fully articulated in the Old Testament? It is in the Ten Commandments.

When we look at the Ten Commandments, which are the essence and the foundation of all moral law, we can see that their whole meaning can be summed up in one word—respect, or even better, reverence. Reverence for God and for the name of God, reverence for the Lord's day, respect for parents, respect for life, respect for property, respect for personality, respect for the truth and for another person's good name, respect for oneself so that wrong desires may never overpower us—these are the fundamental principles behind the Ten Commandments, principles of reverence for God, and respect for our neighbours and for ourselves.¹

Now with this in mind think again of Jesus' teaching we heard today. He refers to two of the commandments pertaining to how we are to respect others, under the themes of

1. Murder
2. Adultery

He takes commandments numbers 5 and 6 and gets to the very essence of each of them in order to show us that reverence is an inside job. While one could conclude by reading the commandments that if I have not murdered or committed adultery I have kept commandments 5 and 6, Jesus says, hold on now, don't jump to a false conclusion. He shows us that the Commandments do not only address external actions, rather he shows how they zero in on

¹ Barclay, W. (2001). The Gospel of Matthew (Third Ed., p. 151). Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press.

interior attitudes. Jesus teaches this repeatedly; he has come to change us from the inside out. This is the very thing he is teaching in his application of the commandments dealing with murder; and adultery. He has come to fulfill each of them by teaching us they are like a spiritual MRI, showing something of the state of our heart.

So let's look at each of these in turn and see how Jesus calls us to an examination of our hearts. According to what Jesus is saying in this gospel reading, we are invited to ask:

1. Do I Respect Human Dignity?
2. Do I Respect the Human Body?

- **Do I respect human dignity?**

Human dignity is the principle whereby we treat others with the honour that is their due because they are made in the image of God. It requires speaking in ways that build up relationships and curtailing speech that diminishes the value of the other person. When we allow anger to take root in our lives, the casualty is the loss of reverence of and dignity for the other person.

Listen to the precision of Jesus' words:

But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire.

Notice the movement of these words from interior attitude to outward contempt. It is in three steps:

Step 1: The fault of feeling angry

Step 2: The fault of passing an insulting remark

Step 3: The fault of irrational anger.

Is it wrong to experience anger? Well no. St. Paul in Ephesians 4 tells us: "Be angry but do not sin".² The problem Jesus highlights is that so often our anger does lead us to sin. The interior attitude leads to insult which in turn leads to irrational rage.

The word translated as "insults" in the language Jesus spoke, Aramaic, is the word "*raca*". It is not an easy word to translate. It means "foolish, stupid, crazy". The Jews used it to indicate utter contempt; often, instead of verbal abuse they would show their feelings by spitting on the ground³.

² Ephesians 4:26

³ Saint Matthew's Gospel. (2005). (p. 53). Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers.

The word that is then translated as “you fool” is even more intense and indicates that the person has been entirely written off and deemed worthless.

Jesus teaches something so important here. If we harbour anger it will become so explosive we will find ourselves in the hell of fire; that is the time of eternal punishment. This shows the gravity of external sins against charity—gossip, backbiting, calumny etc. However, we should remember that these sins stem from the heart; our Lord focusses our attention, first, on internal sins—resentment, hatred etc.—to make us realize that that is where the root lies and that it is important to nip anger in the bud and so respect human dignity.⁴

How prevalent this kind of anger is today and we can make it so impersonal. So often dialogue threads online are filled with vitriol and the kind of insulting words and dismissive attitudes Jesus warns us against.

What about in the home, at work, at school and wherever people gather. If you allow Jesus’ words to examine your heart, are you guilty of the kind of anger that has diminished the human dignity of another person?

How destructive this kind of anger can be! Dearly beloved we all have to examine the role anger plays in our lives and when we know we have violated the reverence due to another person, admit that we have committed a mortal sin and as soon as possible go to confession.

For some of us anger has perhaps so gripped our hearts that we also need the wisdom of a spiritual director and or counsellor.

Do not let the sun go down on your anger thereby giving the devil a foothold.

- **Do I respect the human body?**

Now Jesus asks us a second question: Do I respect the human body? Listen to how he phrases it:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

There is a pandemic today that is unprecedented. The disregard for the dignity of the human body resulting from the viewing of pornography is out of control. In most homes, even many Catholic homes, how easy it is to look lustfully at a woman or lustfully at a man. Turn on the computer, open up the phone or tablet and within seconds lust consumes the heart. What the eyes look at profoundly affects the heart! Listen to these words of Jesus from Matthew 6:22:

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; 23 but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness.

⁴ Saint Matthew’s Gospel. (2005). (p. 53). Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers.

In other words, says Jesus, the viewing of porn is soul destroying. St. Jose Maria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei, says in his book *The Way*:

“The eyes! Through them many iniquities enter the soul. So many experiences like David’s! If you guard your sight you will have assured the guard of your heart”⁵

So serious says Jesus is this sin that we have to take drastic measures to overcome it.

If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

Jesus could not be clearer.

And so I ask you, what place does pornography play in your life? Is it something with which you struggle? If so, do you desire to overcome its luring presence? I want to encourage you to fight to battle this 21st century vice.

May these words from Sirach 15 be your rallying cry:

***If you will, you can keep the commandments, they will save you;
if you trust in God, you too shall live.
16 He has placed before you fire and water:
stretch out your hand for whichever you wish.
17 Before a man are life and death, good and evil,
and whichever he chooses will be given to him.***

If you are dealing with a habit or addiction to pornography these are words to tape to your computer screen, place in your bedroom, as a sticky note on the dashboard, Sirach 15:15-17. If you struggle with porn, you have a choice to either deal with this terrible vice or allow your soul to be engulfed by its darkness.

Let me state that I know it is not an easy habit to overcome. For some of you listening to me today, it has become an addiction in your life. Much research is being conducted in this field. Some of the leading researchers have started a Catholic Web Site called *Reclaim*.⁶

Listen to what is written there:

The mountains of clinical data and visual evidence as millions continue their out-of-control porn use despite consequences of divorce, loss of employment, destroyed reputations, prison time, etc., shouts the obvious: “YES, PORNOGRPAHY IS ADDICTIVE!” And just in case there are still a few stubborn hold-outs,

⁵ Saint Matthew’s Gospel. (2005). (p. 54). Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers

⁶ If you want to find out more about “Reclaim” go to their website at: <https://reclaimsexualhealth.com/>.

*research is currently being conducted
by some of the world's leading experts
in the neuroscience and neuropsychology
fields that will provide the clinical evidence required to officially enter sex and pornography as
"addictions" in the DSM (Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders).*

There is material on the Reclaim website that will help people suffering from porn addiction to both understand, treat and with support from their priests, family and friends, overcome the darkness resulting from this modern outworking of lust.⁷

Jesus has come to fulfill the moral law. How pertinent the teaching about anger and lust is for us today. So many are accepting that such is life..... Where anger rages in the home and pornography emanates from our screens. But it need not be so. For as Sirach says:

*The eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him,
and he knows every deed of man.
20 He has not commanded any one to be ungodly,
and he has not given any one permission to sin.*

Let's take to heart Jesus' has come to fulfill the moral law and so grow in respecting both human dignity and the human body.

⁷ Please read this paper: https://reclaimsexualhealth.com/images/phocadownload/is_pornography_a_drug.pdf