

## **Sixth Sunday after Epiphany**

**Year A RCL**

**February 12, 2023**

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 119:1-8; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Matthew 5:21-37

**“But I say to you”**

By: The Rev. Dr. Fabian Villalobos

In continuity with the beatitudes in the fifth chapter of Saint Matthew, reading and reflecting that we are salt and light of the world, today the proposed text of the liturgy concentrates on our personal and community relationships. The way Jesus introduces his vision and interpretation of the law, guarantees the whole fulfilment of the law that yields fruits. Jesus proves that he does not want to end the mosaic law or diminish its value, rather he offers a new and refresh understanding of it.

“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times... But I say to you,” is a phrase we hear today at different times and about a variety of subjects. This new way of fulfilling the law has the excess of righteousness that is needed to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. (Mt 5:20). We continue wrestling with the obedience of the commandments as the fundamental principle of

our Christian life. This wrestling brings a question: are we working to be in or out of heaven; is it enough to be a keeper and observer of the law? As Christians, we need to be superior to the average fellow human behavior. If we want to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, our righteousness needs to exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

“But I say to you” from Jesus’s perspective, is the way how he fulfils the law in first person and gives testimony of his obedience. The Son knows how to please and be obedient to the Father. Jesus wants all children of God to partake in heaven, for this reason, he raises the standards and goes deep in the fulfillment of the law. In affirming that he has come to fulfill the law (Mt 5:17), Jesus proves that as Son of God, he is the Author and Giver of the law, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, “Only those who apprehend the law as the word of Christ are in position to fulfill it. Only knowing Christ as Giver and Fulfiler of the law can we attain true knowledge of the law.”

“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’ ... “But I say to you” It is more than murder, it is about being angry, insulting, or calling a brother or sister a fool. In mentioning this, Jesus includes that more is required than murdering another. There are clever ways to kill a person, in the way how we treat and relate with others

without respect and compassion for them. Jesus is raising the average standard of righteousness when he says that when we show anger, insult, or contempt towards others, we are killing them. Social sores like racism, discrimination, toxic masculinity, violence, etc., are all extremes, expressions, and accumulations of the single behavior of killing. Therefore, this new interpretation of the law by Jesus calls us to acknowledge that we can easily become killers and murderers.

Following the idea of the integrity of the person, Jesus also raises the standard of the religious practices, asking for reconciliation with others before we come to worship. "First be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift." In this way, Jesus is refreshing the notion that we find in the Old Testament where justice is caring and respecting the other, with this being the worship that God prefers, more than empty rituals, worship requires the recognition of the image of God in the other. True righteousness is reconciliation, and being reconcilers in a broken world where pride, envy, and revenge seem abundant, our role as Christians is to have higher standards like those of Jesus, the reconciler of the whole humanity.

Regarding the holiness of human life, Jesus continues teaching about human relationships, the fulfilment of the law, about married life where adultery and divorce are a deviation of the original plan of God. In the case of adultery, it is more than sins of the body; it is about the heart, the desires of the heart. Today when we hear of online relationships and virtual addictions, it is understandable that Jesus in raising the standard of righteousness is advocating for Christians to be of a truthful and loving heart, where husband or wife are united and not divided.

The last part of Jesus teachings has to do with the keeping of human vows and the truthfulness of the human word. Today, we complete contracts, sign documents, use witnesses and engage in business only through paperwork and online documents where is possible to verify and be accountable. Even with all of that, people often lack fulfilling their promises and obligations. Jesus in raising the standard of righteousness in our relationship with God and in the life as a couple or with others requires honesty, integrity, and dependability. "Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one." This is an order and a warning from Jesus. Our lack of commitment makes us deceivers and liars.

Faithful and truthful believers strive to be like the Father, who commits and fulfills, even if this requires offering His only Son on the cross.

As we witness Jesus' obedience on the cross, boldly accept the new interpretation of the law, knowing that as we commit to keep the commandments, then we are transformed and filled with the superior righteousness to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.