

6TH SUNDAY OT YEAR A

Joshua Sirach is the author of today's 1st reading.

He was a Jewish scribe concerned for the welfare of the Diaspora (Jews living outside Israel)

He is writing to a group living in Alexandria where they were exposed to the pervasive influence of a mostly Hellenistic culture which was contrary to the religious practices of the Jews.

He asserted that there should be no compromise with the prevailing culture, when it came to keeping God's laws. God never forces us to do good or evil. It is our free choice to obey or disobey God's laws, and we are responsible for the serious consequences of our choices.

This aspect is also picked up in today's gospel.

In the second reading, Paul contrasts the wisdom of the prevailing Greek culture with the wisdom of God's revelation. He advised Christians to seek true wisdom in God's revelation, instead of indulging in endless

discussions of Greek philosophy. God in his wisdom has saved us through Jesus Christ and prepared us to love Him.

In Old Testament times the Jews did not fully understand the Law in simple legalistic terms. The problem being that there were too many laws.

The Ten Commandments

The Pentateuch

The law of the Prophets

These were called the mosaic laws, as laid down by the prophets.

Then there was the Torah, the oral laws and precepts laid down by Moses. Laws that covered all aspects of daily life from the food and its preparation, to hygiene, to the washing of pots and pans etc.

Jesus, and later Paul, considered these oral laws as a heavy and unnecessary burden on the people and criticized them, whilst holding up the value of the mosaic laws.

Today's gospel, taken from the continuing Sermon on the Mount, explains that justification or sanctification is a

grace from God. Our role is one of cooperating with that grace by being faithful to it.

Jesus goes on to outline new moral standards for his disciples and for us as well. He then explains the real applications of the mosaic laws concerning murder, adultery and false oaths.

With regard to murder, the 5th commandment means much more. He tells us not to get angry in such a way as we sin.

There are three aspects of anger

Anger of the heart

Anger of speech

Anger of action

Anger of the heart involves a sudden blazing flame of anger which boils inside and lingers so that the heart seeks revenge and refuses to forgive or forget.

Anger in speech involves using words which hurt and insult or are damaging to the reputation of others.

Anger in action is the result of the others; sudden outbursts of uncontrollable anger often result in physical assault or abuse

Jesus outlines a new moral code for his followers. He insists that adultery, the violation of the 6th commandment, is also committed through willful and deliberate impure thoughts and desires.

Our hands can become causes of sin according to what we touch and how we touch, in lust, greed or violence. Our eyes become agents of sin according to what they look at. When Jesus talks of mutilating our body parts he is speaking literally. We have more sins than we have body parts. And the mind which is the cause of most sin remains intact.

Jesus is saying that we must be ready to separate ourselves from anything that causes us to commit grave sin, because this leads to spiritual death.

Last week Jesus called us to be salt and light to the world. The week before he gave us in the beatitudes, a recipe for living a good life.

Today he expands further on the codes that govern our lives, particularly in terms of honesty and morality.

How then do we apply these precepts in our daily lives?

It's easy to explain but difficult to achieve, unless we have faith.

We need to obey God's laws, appreciating the basic principles, those of reverence and respect.

The first 4 commandments cover reverence for god and all that he stands for and reverence for our parents.

The next set tells us to respect life, our personal integrity that of our neighbor and ones spouse.

In these difficult times when the church is under serious attack, because of the sins of many of our clergy, and others in trusted positions, who ignored everything outlined by Jesus today, we need to renew our efforts to be true to God, ourselves and others.

Let us allow Jesus words of truth to penetrate our minds and hearts and form our consciences, making us all, men and women, clergy and religious included, people of love and integrity.