

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A

[Sirach 15:15-20; 1 Cor. 2:6-10; Mt. 5:17-37]

Excerpts from Pope Francis – *Angelus* - 12 February 2023

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Brothers and sisters, in today's Gospel, Jesus says: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill" (*Mt 5:17*). *To fulfill*: this is a key word to understand Jesus and his message. But what does this fulfilment mean? To explain this, the Lord begins by saying what fulfilment is *not*. The Scripture says, "You shall not murder", but for Jesus this is not enough if brothers and sisters are then hurt by words. The Scripture says, "You shall not commit adultery", but this is not enough if one then lives a love tainted by unfaithfulness and falsehood. The Scripture says, "You shall not bear false witness", but it is not enough to take a solemn oath if one then acts with hypocrisy (cf. *Mt 5:21-37*). This is not fulfillment.

To give us a concrete example, Jesus concentrates on the "rite of the offertory". By making an offering to God, one answers freely to his gifts. It is a very important rite — making an offering to respond symbolically, the gratuitousness of his gifts — so important that to interrupt it was forbidden other than for serious reasons. But Jesus states that it must be interrupted if a brother has something against us, in order to go and be reconciled with him first (cf. vv. 23-24): only in this way is the rite *fulfilled*. The message is clear: God loves us first, freely, taking the first step towards us, without us deserving it. It means we cannot celebrate his love without in turn taking the first step towards reconciliation with those who have hurt us.

In this way there is fulfillment in God's eyes; otherwise, external, purely ritualistic observance is pointless, it becomes a pretence. In other words, Jesus makes us understand that religious rules are necessary, they are good, but they are only the beginning: to fulfill them, it is necessary to go beyond the letter and live their meaning. The commandments that God gave us should not be locked up in the airless vaults of formal observance; otherwise, we are limited to an exterior, detached religiosity, servants of "God the master" rather than children of "God the Father". Jesus wants this: not to have the idea of serving a God who is master, but Father; and this is why it is necessary to go beyond the letter.

Brothers and sisters, this problem was present not only in Jesus' time; it is there today too. At times, for example, we hear some say, "Father, I have not killed, I have not stolen, I have not harmed anyone...", as if to say, "I am fine". This is formal observance, which is satisfied with the *bare minimum*, whereas Jesus invites us to aspire to the *maximum possible*. That is: God does not reason with calculations and tables; he loves us as one who is hooked: not to the minimum, but to the maximum!

He does not say, “I love you up to a certain point”. No, true love is never up to a certain point and is never satisfied; love always goes beyond, it cannot do otherwise. The Lord showed us this by giving his life on the cross and forgiving his murderers (cf. *Lk* 23:34). And he entrusted to us the commandment most dear to him: that we love one another *like he* loved us (cf. *Jn* 15:12). This is the love that gives fulfilment to the Law, to faith, to true life!

So, brothers and sisters, we can ask ourselves: how do I live faith? Is it a matter of calculations, or a love story with God? Am I content merely with not doing harm, keeping the “façade” in good order, or do I try to grow in love for God and others? And every now and then, do I check myself on Jesus’ great commandment, do I ask myself if I love my neighbour as God loves me? Because perhaps we are inflexible in judging others and forget to be merciful, as God is with us.

May this Eucharist help us to not only observe the Word of God but help us to give fulfilment to our faith and our charity. May our offering *fulfill*, be a response to God’s gifts.