

# SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Sirach = SEER-ak

The tone of this reading is set by the "ifs" that begin it, placing it in the conditional. The claims it makes are somewhat harsh.

Emphasis on "no one" and "none."

For meditation and context:

**TO KEEP IN MIND**  
The attention you bring to your proclaiming enables you to pray the Word of God with the assembly.

## LECTIONARY #76

READING I Sirach 15:15–20

### A reading from the Book of Sirach

If you **choose** you can keep the **commandments**, they will **save** you;  
if you trust in **God**, you **too** shall **live**;  
he has set **before** you **fire** and **water**;  
to **whichever** you **choose**, stretch **forth** your **hand**.  
Before **man** are **life** and **death**, **good** and **evil**,  
whichever he **chooses** shall be **given** him.  
**Immense** is the **wisdom** of the **LORD**;  
he is **mighty** in **power**, and **all-seeing**.  
The eyes of **God** are on **those** who **fear** him;  
he **understands** man's **every deed**.  
**No one** does he **command** to act **unjustly**,  
to none does he give **license** to **sin**.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 119:1–2, 4–5, 17–18, 33–34 (1b)

### R. Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!

Blessed are they whose way is blameless,  
who walk in the law of the LORD.  
Blessed are they who observe his decrees,  
who seek him with all their heart.

Be good to your servant, that I may live  
and keep your words.  
Open my eyes, that I may consider  
the wonders of your law.

You have commanded that your precepts  
be diligently kept.  
Oh, that I might be firm in the ways  
of keeping your statutes!

Instruct me, O LORD, in the way of  
your statutes,  
that I may exactly observe them.  
Give me discernment, that I may observe  
your law  
and keep it with all my heart.

**READING I** The wisdom writing of Ben Sira comes from the early second century bc. This was a time of difficult choices for the descendants of Abraham. When the Babylonians destroyed the first Temple in 586 bc and forced the Israelites into exile, the chosen people wrestled with how to live the covenant with God without temple sacrifice. Their solution was to write down and to study the Torah, learning to inscribe the Law in their hearts. Upon their return to Jerusalem, with the second Temple reconstructed around the year 515 bc, the Israelites had to reconsider how

to worship. Did keeping the covenant demand animal sacrifice or study of the Torah?

The words in today's first reading can help illuminate what the life of the faithful should look like. Life is to be found in the choice to keep the commandments and to pursue understanding the Lord's wisdom. For generations, the Hebrew people learned to trust in the sacrifices they made as a means of assuring God's blessing. However, Sirach reminds them of the choice between truly trusting in God or relying upon them-

selves. Placing one's confidence and hope in God's wisdom will be the path to life.

This reading helps us to better understand the gift of free will. One who chooses the path of life does so freely. The same is true with the one who chooses to follow the way of death. God does not lead a person to choose one path over the other. God is not responsible for our sin; sin comes from human choice alone. Human freedom is a part of God's will, and God wills not to rid the world of sin, because to do so would be to remove the gift of freedom. Following the commandments prevents one from

Corinthians = kohr-IN-thee-uhnz

Paul deftly shifts the source of wisdom from the human to the divine, which is "mysterious" and "hidden." His tone is authoritative but also awed.

Emphasis on "Spirit" and "depths."

A lengthy reading extensively recording Jesus' instruction and advice to his disciples. Because of its legalistic quality, pacing yourself as you proclaim will be helpful, so its points can come through. Emphasis on "not."

making the choice to sin; thus, how foolish one would be to choose sin over searching for the Lord's wisdom!

**READING II** It is not often in the Sunday lectionary that the first and second readings are closely connected thematically, but today's readings are a rare exception. Just as Ben Sira urges the pursuit of wisdom as a life-giving choice, so too does Paul call the Christians in Corinth to proclaim God's wisdom. Let us not forget that some within the Corinthian community believed themselves to be spiritually elite,

## READING II 1 Corinthians 2:6–10

### A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

#### Brothers and sisters:

We speak a **wisdom** to those who are **mature**,

not a **wisdom** of this **age**,

nor of the **rulers** of this **age** who are **passing away**.

**Rather**, we speak **God's wisdom**, **mysterious**, **hidden**,  
which **God predetermined** before the **ages** for our **glory**,

and which **none** of the **rulers** of this **age** **knew**;

**or**, if they had **known** it,

they would not have **crucified** the **Lord** of **glory**.

But as it is **written**:

*What **eye** has not **seen**, and **ear** has not **heard**,*

*and what has not **entered** the human **heart**,*

*what **God** has **prepared** for **those** who **love** him,*

**this God** has **revealed** to us through the **Spirit**.

For the **Spirit** scrutinizes **everything**, even the **depths** of **God**.

## GOSPEL Matthew 5:17–37

### A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

[Jesus said to his **disciples**:]

"Do not **think** that I have come to abolish the **law**  
or the **prophets**.

I have come **not** to **abolish** but to **fulfill**.

**Amen**, I say to you, until **heaven** and **earth** pass away,  
not the **smallest letter** or the **smallest part** of a **letter**  
will **pass** from the **law**,  
until **all things** have taken **place**. >>

priding themselves over and above "weaker" members.

For Paul, wisdom is a gift provided by the Spirit that is meant to draw the community closer together. It is not to be a source of pride or a cause for division. Unlike the wisdom provided by this world, the wisdom of God is eternal and unknown by political forces or even those who claim to be religious (such as the type Paul suggests are responsible for the Lord's crucifixion). The wisdom of God is not something that human power can attain on its own, it belongs to those upon whom it is bestowed

by God. Thus, those who are wise ought to never be full of their own wisdom, since God is the source of this gift.

It is not by accident that wisdom, "mysterious, hidden," came into this world; rather, the revelation of wisdom is part of God's plan for salvation. If the "rulers of this age" (both the Jewish and Roman ones) had properly discerned this plan, they would not have put Jesus to death. According to God's plan, his wisdom rests on those who love him.

In establishing that the Spirit is the conduit through which God reveals himself,

This begins a long series of characterizations in which the word at the end of the line (for the most part) is emphasized. Let the emphasized words guide your proclamation.

Sanhedrin = san-HEE-druhn

Gehenna = geh-HEN-nah

**Therefore**, whoever breaks **one** of the **least** of these **commandments**

and teaches others to **do** so

will be called least in the **kingdom** of **heaven**.

But whoever **obeys** and **teaches** these **commandments** will be called **greatest** in the kingdom of **heaven**.

[I tell you, unless your **righteousness** surpasses that of the **scribes** and **Pharisees**, you will not **enter** the **kingdom** of **heaven**.

*“You have **heard** that it was said to your **ancestors**,  
You shall not **kill**; and whoever kills will be liable to **judgment**.*

But I **say** to you,

whoever is **angry** with his **brother** will be **liable** to **judgment**;

and whoever says to his brother, ‘**Raqa**,’

will be answerable to the **Sanhedrin**;

and whoever says, ‘You **fool**,’

will be liable to **fiery Gehenna**.

**Therefore**, if you bring your **gift** to the **altar**,

and there recall that your **brother**

has anything **against** you,

leave your **gift** there at the **altar**,

go **first** and be **reconciled** with your **brother**,

and then **come** and offer your **gift**.

**Settle** with your opponent **quickly** while on the way to **court**.

**Otherwise** your **opponent** will hand you **over** to the **judge**,

and the **judge** will hand you **over** to the **guard**,

and you will be **thrown** into **prison**.

**Amen**, I **say** to you,

you will **not** be **released** until you have **paid** the last **penny**.

Paul loosely quotes Isaiah 64:3, writing: “What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him.” Love of God is necessary for the gift of wisdom. Paul suggests that one who does not love God, and therefore neighbor, is incapable of understanding God’s ways. God’s plan may have been kept secret for many ages, but now it is revealed to those who believe. The one who knows a Christian’s belief is the Spirit alone; the spiritually wise are incapable of this discernment without the scrutiny of the Spirit.

#### GOSPEL

After first proclaiming the Beatitudes and then calling his disciples salt and light, Jesus now continues the Sermon on the Mount with teaching his disciples a new way of observing the commandments. His way of approaching the ancient law is not to throw it out but rather to fulfill it, which is fully in keeping with Matthew’s presentation of Jesus’ ministry in general. Even though the Gospel of Matthew highlights many of the confrontational interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees, Jesus consistently takes a positive approach to the Jewish law.

In this time of waiting for the eschatological conclusion of the world as we know it (“until heaven and earth pass away”), God’s commands ought to continue to remain in force. With that said, Jesus probes the commandments deeper than most scribes and scholars of the law. He is interested not only in the overt actions which the law either permits or prohibits, but he also wants to scrutinize intentions and the movement of the heart. For example, the first topic from the law that Jesus addresses is murder. Jesus examines the law and suggests that this commandment also calls for the elimination of the anger which would

This volatile and problematic topic demands that you move slowly through this passage.

Still slow.

Slight pause between "Lord" and "all."

["You have **heard** that it was **said**,  
*You shall **not** commit **adultery**.*  
 But I say to you,  
**everyone** who looks at a **woman** with **lust**  
 has already committed **adultery** with her in his heart.]  
 If your **right eye** causes you to **sin**,  
 tear it **out** and throw it **away**.  
 It is **better** for you to lose **one** of your **members**  
 than to have your **whole body** thrown into **Gehenna**.  
 And if your **right hand** causes you to **sin**,  
 cut it **off** and throw it **away**.  
 It is better for you to lose one of your **members**  
 than to have your **whole body** go into **Gehenna**.

"It was also said,  
*Whoever divorces his **wife** must give her a **bill of divorce**.*  
 But I say to you,  
 whoever **divorces** his wife—unless the **marriage** is **unlawful**—  
 causes **her** to commit **adultery**,  
 and whoever marries a **divorced woman** commits adultery.

["**Again** you have **heard** that it was said to your ancestors,  
*Do **not** take a **false oath**,*  
*but make **good** to the **LORD all** that you vow.*  
 But I say to you, do not **swear** at all,  
 not by **heaven**, for it is God's **throne**;  
 nor by the **earth**, for it is his **footstool**;  
 nor by **Jerusalem**, for it is the **city** of the great **King**.  
 Do not **swear** by your **head**,  
 for you cannot make a **single hair white** or **black**.  
 Let your '**Yes**' mean '**Yes**,' and your '**No**' mean '**No**.'  
 Anything **more** is from the **evil one**."]

[Shorter: Matthew 5:20–22a, 27–28, 33–34a, 37 (see brackets)]

eventually cause someone to kill another. Furthermore, anger within one's heart must not simply be overturned, it must also include proper reconciliation with the other. This teaching on the command "thou shall not kill" shows that Jesus demands a deeper sense of ethical responsibility whereby a person does not simply refrain from an evil action but must identify and correct the root causes for the evil action in the first place.

Jesus continues his teaching to his followers by addressing the thorny issues of adultery, divorce, and lying. Adultery is clearly forbidden by the law of Moses (see

Exodus 20:14). However, Jesus wants his disciples to scrutinize the underlying reason for adultery, namely lust. As a means to avoid this temptation, Jesus figuratively suggests tearing one's eye out or cutting off one's sinful hand. The point is to underscore the importance of maintaining right virtue, as to lose virtue would be more detrimental than losing a valuable body part. One exception to the law here that Jesus does make is in regard to divorce. The Mosaic law permitted divorce in certain situations (see Deuteronomy 24:1–4). However, Jesus looks at divorce differently, suggesting that it

leads the abandoned woman to commit adultery. Undoubtedly, Jesus understands the importance of the permanent nature of marriage, but also sees it as an institution that provides for the woman's needs. In the society of his day, a divorced woman would have been without any means of support or security. Finally, Jesus expands the command to refrain from taking the name of the Lord in vain (see Leviticus 19:12) to apply to oath-taking in general. Because God witnesses all false speech, it is necessary to be truthful in all things. S.W.