

HOMILY SUNDAY 6-A (Homily 01)

“Living Wisely”

(Sirach 15:15-20; Ps 119; 1 Cor 2:6-10; Mt 5:17-37)

“It is part of spiritual wisdom to be able to see the eagle in the egg; butterfly in the caterpillar; saint in the sinner.”

That quote from Sr. Joan Chittester, noted spiritual writer and speaker, leads into the message for us from today’s readings: live wisely.

One Oblate brother liked to say that the only thing in life that we absolutely have to do is to die. The rest involves choosing and living with the consequences of those choices.

The readings today are all about making choices, positive choices, wise choices. The first reading advises us to live wisely by making four positive choices: to keep the commandments, to trust God, to be faithful in all we do and to avoid sin in all its forms

In the Gospel, Jesus provides us with a lot of good advice for living well and living wisely. He teaches us to keep the commandments, to trust God more than the scribes and Pharisees, to seek reconciliation and to be faithful in all we do, including marriage.

Sr. Paul, in the second reading, simply echoes that call to biblical wisdom, adding that those who live this way will be rewarded with a glorious future beyond what any human mind or heart could ever conceive. In other words, to live this way must be a priority for us, over anything else.

This brings into play the whole question of our attitude towards the Law of God. For the early Church and Judaism the attitude of Jesus and the church to the Law was an urgent question. The Law was thought to be the summary of all wisdom - human and divine - the revelation of God himself, a complete and a secure guide of conduct and endowed with a sacramental assurance of good relations with God.

This value of the Law Jesus did not and could not accept, because it limited our relationship with God to duty and relying on our own efforts. God, in Jesus, fulfills that part of the Law and takes it to a whole new level, the level of the heart, of an intimate personal relationship of love that transcends all laws.

Following the lead of Jesus, the Church developed its own attitude towards the Law, and this passage of the gospel is Matthew's effort to state Jesus' position toward the Law in general. The New Jerusalem Bible puts it well in this light: "You must set no bounds to your love, just as your heavenly father sets none to his."

This teaching sets the stage for the need to make amends and ask for forgiveness, which is at the heart of the teaching of Jesus in today's gospel. The question of apologizing is a difficult one for most of us, and not that readily understood. We are more used to talking about the need to forgive those who hurt us. The other side of the coin is the need to apologize to those we hurt and to make amends.

An apology, in fact, is complete only when we can make a declaration to the other person that we will never do that again. Mark Pizandawatec, creator of the *Returning To Spirit* Program for healing life's hurts, demonstrated how this declaration works during a training session in Morley, Alberta. Two trainees were late for a session one day, creating much tension in the room, as he never started a session until everyone was present. When they finally came in blushing and apologizing profusely, he called up different trainees to handle the situation. When no one could guess just what he wanted, he took over and simply asked the two latecomers if he could have their word that they would never do that again. They of course made that promise and the session went on as if nothing happened.

Later, Mark used this incident to teach the importance of a declaration. An apology is almost useless, he insisted, without a declaration, a promise to never repeat that hurtful behaviour. He underlined the difference between saying "I feel upset at what you did" and on the other hand, saying "I feel upset at what you did. Now can I count on you never to do that again?" Once the two latecomers had made their declaration, their apology was now complete, reconciliation had taken place and the session could resume with serenity in the room.

Our task as followers of Jesus is to be leading the way in this wise way of life. We are above all asked to love God first and foremost, and to love others as we love ourselves. Loving others happens best when there is both an apology for wrongdoing, a declaration that the wrong-doing will never happen again, and that apology is accepted with heartfelt forgiveness. That is reconciliation at its best, and the heart of the Gospel of living wisely.

Our participation in the Eucharist today is a wise choice on our part, and a living out of the readings for today. We are keeping God's commandments, trusting God,

being faithful, and dealing with our sinful human nature. Above all, we are allowing God to love us through Word and Sacrament, and loving God back through worship and praise.

Empowered by this love of God, we are sent out into the world to be wisdom figures, people who know how to make wise choices that will help realize the reign of God more fully here on earth as we wait in joyful hope for that future that is beyond our wildest imaginings.