

Sermon on the Mount 3: Anger, Lust, Divorce, Swearing (6th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

Sirach 15:15-20—Freely Choose to Act Faithfully

1. Free Will: “to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice...”
2. “Before a man are *life* and *death*, and whichever he chooses will be given to him...”
3. Omniscience of God: he “sees everything”; “knows every deed of man.”

Psalm 119—Blessed are they who follow the Law of the Lord

1. Blessed are they who “walk” in the “law of the Lord” (v. 1-2, 4)
2. Give me the grace to “observe” the law with my “whole heart” (vv. 33-34)

Matthew 5:17-37—Jesus Fulfills the Law: the First Four ‘Antitheses’

1. Not to abolish the Law, but to *fulfill* it (contra Marcion)
 - a. New “Righteousness”: must be “greater” than that of the Pharisees
 - b. “Fulfill” (Greek *plēroō*): “to make complete”
 - c. Not an “iota” (Hebrew letter *yod*) or “dot” (Greek *kerasia*, ‘horn’)
2. Anger and Insults:
 - a. Moses forbade murder (Exod 20:13); Jesus forbids anger and insults/curses
 - b. *Raca* (Ar. “brainless/worthless”); “Fool/moron” (Gk. *mōre*)
 - c. *Gehenna* = realm of spiritual punishment and damnation (cf. Jer 7)
 - d. Augustine: Jesus is *not* forbidding the emotion of anger; but consent to it (e.g., acting on/feeding the anger with outbursts and insults)
3. Adulterous Thoughts:
 - a. Moses forbade adultery (Exod 20:14); Jesus forbids lustful looks
 - b. “Looks at a woman *lustfully*” = “adultery with her in his heart (Gk. *kardia*)
 - c. Hyperbole: plucking eye (=custody of eyes); cutting off hand (control of body)
 - d. Augustine: Jesus does *not* say “who desires a woman”; but “surrender” to lust (e.g., willed fantasizing; a lust that would be sated “if opportunity arose”)
4. Divorce and Remarriage
 - a. Moses permitted divorce (Deut 24:1-4); Jesus forbids divorce and remarriage
 - b. Jesus forbids separation of spouses; with one exception: “a case of *porneia*”
 1. Incest: “Unless the marriage is unlawful” (NAB)
 2. Adultery: “Except for unchastity” (RSV; Fathers)
 - c. Jesus forbids remarriage after separation; *no* exceptions (Marriage indissoluble)
 - d. Augustine: infidelity the sole justification for separation
 - e. Augustine: two options for separated: “remain unmarried” or “be reconciled”
5. Swearing Oaths
 - a. Moses forbade swearing falsely (Lev 19:12); Jesus commands truthful speech
 - b. ‘Light’ oaths: something other than God’s name (heaven/earth/Jerusalem/hair)
 - c. Catechism: “Following St. Paul, the tradition of the Church has understood Jesus’ words as not excluding oaths made for grave and right reasons (for

example, in court)” (CCC 2154; cf. 2 Cor 1:23; Gal 1:20)

The Catechism on the New Law

1. New Law: “fulfills,” refines, surpasses, leads the Old to its perfection.” (CCC 1967)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (6th Sunday Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. Jesus said that not one “iota” of the Old Law would pass away until all was fulfilled. He considered every letter (or part of a letter!) to be inspired and important. Yet how many Christians neglect to study the Old Testament? Reflect on your own experience of reading the Old Testament. How often do you study it? Do you “delight” in the study of the “law” as in Psalm 119?

2. One of the Church’s most controversial teachings is its insistence on the indissolubility of marriage and the prohibition of divorce and remarriage. And yet this teaching comes straight from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Review the Catechism’s summary of Jesus’ teaching (CCC 2382-86). Does it make sense to you? How has this teaching affected your own life or the life of someone you know?

For Further Study in the Catechism

1. The New Law (CCC 1965-1986)
2. The Sin of Anger (see CCC 2302)
3. Adulterous Thoughts (CCC 2514-2527)
4. Divorce and Remarriage (CCC 2382-2386)
5. Swearing Oaths (CCC 2153-54)

Jesus’ Teaching on Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage

1. Indissolubility: “The Lord Jesus insisted on the original intention of the Creator who willed that marriage be *indissoluble*” (CCC 2382)
2. Permission for Separation: “The *separation* of spouses while maintaining the marriage bond can be legitimate in certain cases provided for by canon law” (CCC 2383).
3. Prohibition of Remarriage: “*Divorce* is a grave offense against the natural law... Contracting a new union, even if it is recognized by civil law, adds to the gravity of the rupture: the remarried spouse is then in a situation of public and permanent adultery.” (CCC 2384)
4. Innocent Spouses: “It can happen that one of the spouses is the innocent victim of a divorce decreed by civil law; this spouse has not therefore contravened the moral law.”

Saint Augustine, *Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, in Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), Volume 6, pp. 10-24.

(Also available at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/16011.htm>)