

Moral Relativism

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Mt 5:17-37

Ave Maria Catholic Church, February 12, 2023 - Fr. David M Vidal

Last Sunday, Jesus invited us to be the *light of the world* and the *salt of the earth*. This Sunday, we continue reading St. Matthew's gospel, and now Jesus tells us that He did not come to abolish the law but to bring it to fulfillment. He also indicates that our answer to the demands of the law must be unequivocal: "*Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the evil one,*" (See Mt 5:17-37).

In a world where all things seem relative to fashions, tastes, desires, and moods, Jesus asks for our definitive answer according to truth. In a world where truth and absolute standards of moral behavior are traded for individual opinions, cultural preferences, or the desires of the majority, Jesus declares: "*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,*" (Mt 5: 18).

Jesus tells us that there is a law that we must respect. Truth and moral behavior cannot be reduced to one's taste. However, that is not the opinion of moral relativism.

What is moral relativism?

Moral relativism is a theory which proclaims that moral behavior is founded on the opinions of individuals or a group of people and that moral absolutes, objective moral truths that hold for all people in all places at all times, do not exist.

According to moral relativism, it makes no sense to ask the abstract question if a given act is good or bad. According to moral relativism, there is no good or bad in the abstract. An act may be good for one person but bad for another, or good in one cultural setting but bad in another, but it cannot be a good or bad act in its totality.

Those who support moral relativism will say that different individuals and cultures have different moral beliefs. According to this view, morality is merely a product of personal opinion or culture.

Does Jesus teach moral relativism?

Let us read the gospel. Let us hear Jesus's words: "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. 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,*" (Mt. 5: 17-19).

Christ does not accept moral relativism. He teaches that there is law and order and that law and order have their foundation in God's truth and goodness. Did not Jesus come to teach us that we must belong to the kingdom of truth and not to the kingdom of human opinions? He died for that!

Pontius Pilate asked Jesus: *are you a king?* And Jesus answered: *"You say I am a king. For this, I was born, and for this, I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."* (John 18: 37).

Do we truly listen to the voice of Jesus? Martyrs and confessors of faith did listen to his voice.

The lives of martyrs and confessors of faith constantly challenge us. They confront us and compel us to reflect. One can feel either admiration or hatred for someone who prefers to give his life rather than betray the voice of his own conscience, but certainly, one cannot remain indifferent.

They have so many things to tell us.

First, they tell us that we must be people of conscience. The Second Vatican Council calls conscience "man's most secret sanctuary" and explains: *"Deep within his conscience, man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells him interiorly at the right moment: do this, don't do that,"* (Gaudium et Spes, 16).

Second, they teach us that we must have an upright conscience. How important it is for our conscience to be *upright*, to make judgments based on truth, to call *good* what is *good* and *evil* what is *evil*, to know – as Saint Paul proclaims – how to *"prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect,"* (Rom 12:2).

But to have an upright conscience, we must illustrate our consciences. How do we do that? Let us listen to Jesus's voice. It is not just my opinion, but Jesus's words handed down and taught by the Church that truly matters. Jesus teaches us God's love, truth, and the order He has established for our good and eternal happiness.

If we truly listen to Jesus's voice, we will learn to say *yes* when it should be *yes*, and *no* when our answer must be *no*. We will learn to say *yes* to what is good and *no* to what is evil. And our *yes* will be a definitive *yes*, and our *no* will be a definitive *no*. It will not be a *maybe*.

Is it important to say *yes* when it is *yes* and *no* when it is *no*? The lives of martyrs and confessors of faith answer that question for us. And Saint Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, explains the reason behind their actions: *"Eye has not seen, and ear has not*

heard, and has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him,” (1 Cor 2: 9).

Let us listen to Jesus’s voice. Let us love what is true, what is good, what is honest, and what is pure. Then, we will enjoy the beautiful life that Jesus offers us. Amen.