

Measuring our Spiritual Life

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time - Lk 6:27-38

Ave Maria Catholic Church, February 20, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

The gospel of Saint Luke recalls Jesus's conversation with his disciples. Here, Jesus presents to his disciples a very high standard of life. These are very striking words: "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." These statements are uncommon. Many times, it was said, love your friends and do good to them, but to love those who do not love you, and to do good to them, that was unheard of.

Jesus brings to us new life, and for that reason, he gives us a new way of thinking, willing, and acting. Jesus establishes a new covenant and sets new and higher standards of life. He is the Master we must hear; He is the example we must follow. And He says: "*I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.*" (Jn 13: 34). This is Jesus's commandment of love. He asks us to love as He loves.

Now, it is difficult to accept commandments. It is not unusual to hear people saying: "This is my way of thinking," or "this is my view." And this self-centered point of view leads people to say, "I do what I want to do," "this is my choice," "Nobody can tell me what I must do."

Is it truly the case? Are we completely independent of any law and commandment?

Think for a moment: You cannot live for an extended period of time without eating, or without sleeping, or without breathing. You cannot say, I will do whatever I want and from now on I will not sleep; I will do whatever I want and from now on I will not breathe. Breathing, eating, and sleeping are some of the natural limits that we must respect. Why should we do that? In few words, because we must adhere to the natural laws of creation. We must respect God's beautiful plan of creation.

The same happens with the commandments of the law. God tells us: "*I am the LORD your God. You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. Honor your father and your mother. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.*" When God tells us all these things, He asks us to respect the beauty of creation, the beauty of our lives and the purpose of our existence. God's commandments and laws are not rules of oppressions. God's commandments are principles of true freedom and goodness in our lives.

When a mother or a father tells their children: “Don’t go near that wild animal, or don’t eat that poisonous food; or when they say: “study your lessons, or help your siblings;” are they saying these things for the sake of oppression? Obviously, that is not the case. All these directives are given for the sake of love. Because they love, they do not want their children to be hurt by evil things, and they want them to progress in goodness. That is precisely what God wants for us.

The commandments are God’s messages of love. He loves us so much that He tells us: “do not hurt yourself by doing evil and help yourself by doing good, respect the beauty of creation in your life.”

Now, what are God’s commandments?

Sometimes, we have a very selective understanding of God’s commandments. Have you not heard people saying: “*I do not kill, and I do not steal, therefore, I am a good person*”? Certainly, the person who does not kill or steal has been blessed by not committing those evil acts, but the moral law is not reduced to those two commandments. Sometimes, we reduce the moral law to our own liking. Then, “*we strain a fly out of our drink, but swallow a camel!*” (Mt. 23:24).

We need to expand our vision to try to see ourselves according to God’s view of ourselves. A good way to start our examination is to recall Jesus’s account of the last judgment, when those on the right of the King will hear these words: “*Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me*” . . . *And the king will say to them, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me,’*” (Mt 25: 34-40).

The moral law goes beyond the commands “do not kill and do not steal.” We must also feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit those in prison, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, bury the dead, admonish the sinner, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive offenses, and pray for the living and the dead.

In addition, the moral law goes also beyond the external aspect of our actions. Sometimes, we pay attention to the exterior, and we forget the interior. We reject the action of killing, but we forget that hatred is also an evil that can divide families and people. Jesus comes to us to correct our vision, as he says: “*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,*” (Mt. 5: 21-22).

In today's gospel, Jesus gives us even higher moral standards: *"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you?"* (See Lk 6:27-38).

These are God's commandments; these are Jesus's commandments. They are not rules for our oppression, but they are the guidance that we need for our salvation. They do not seek our misery. They offer eternal happiness. They do not restrain our freedom. They make us truly free.

Out of love God gave us the beautiful natural order and law that we must respect; out of love God gave us the commandments of the law that we must follow for our good; out of love Jesus came to us saying: *"As I have loved you, so you also should love one another,"* (John 13: 34).

Then, he took up the cross, and carried it to mount Calvary, and he said: *"Father, forgive them."* He died on the cross and gave us life.

We cannot be satisfied with the "I do not kill; I do not steal."

God commands us to do what is right, good, and beautiful. He does not ask us just to be ourselves, but he challenges us and encourages us to be even greater than what we think we can be: *"Be holy as your heavenly Father is holy,"* (Mt. 5:48).

Let us measure our spiritual life according to God's measure, and our lives will become truly beautiful. Amen