

Homily for the 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 15-16, 2019

Readings: Sirach 15:15-20; 1 Cor 2:6-10; Mt 5:17-37

Preacher: Deirdre McKiernan Hetzler

“If you choose,” Sirach says, “you can keep the commandments...to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice.” St. Paul says we are called to choose to live, not according to the wisdom of this age, but according to the wisdom of God. And Jesus says he has not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.

Choice. Wisdom. Law. How can we understand the connections?

The key is that we have been trusted with the indwelling of God's own Spirit! God's wisdom, Paul reminds us, has been revealed to us in the life of Jesus. Made known to us “through the Spirit.” That same Spirit makes it possible for us to live as Jesus did. Difficult? Yes. Just think about the profound inner change called for in the Beatitudes we heard two weeks ago! But, as Sr. Joan reminded us last week, God doesn't ask the impossible. God's grace, through the Spirit, is poured out on us.

And the law that Jesus says he came to fulfill? The commandments Sirach invites us to keep? For the Pharisees, it was all about rules. For Jesus, it's all about love. In reply to the Pharisee's question about the greatest commandment Jesus said: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. That is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

This is the mature wisdom Paul speaks of. Given us through the Spirit. Inviting us to solidarity with the whole human family. Loving our neighbors as ourselves. No exceptions! We are, as it were, bathed in God's love. Enabling us, in the Spirit, to spread that love to all we meet.

“Open my eyes, so I may behold wondrous things out of your law,” says the psalmist. We would behold wondrous things, indeed, wouldn't we, if every

action was rooted in love?

What are the opportunities to love in our daily lives? Perhaps it's as simple as complimenting the cashier in Wegmans who is getting grief over the ban on plastic bags. Or phoning someone who is having a bad day. Bringing dinner to someone who is housebound. Greeting the new family in the neighborhood with a loaf of fresh baked bread. Signing a petition to end the abuse in private prisons. Composting or limiting use of resources to save our earthly home.

Sometimes living faithfully is less simple. Might even be costly. On Christmas Eve, a man called his bank's help line because he was stuck at a gas station when his credit card malfunctioned. He could neither finish his Christmas shopping, nor even go home. The woman answering the help line received her supervisor's permission to bring him \$20 so he could at least get home. Although she was a decorated employee, she and her supervisor were both fired for their kindness. Later, when the story went viral, she began to receive other employment offers. (Love in action there!)

Sometimes, it involves risk-taking. Years ago, some Rochester police officers went on trial for brutality. They admitted the abuse, but justified it because "Those guys were bad. They deserved it." The officers were acquitted. Another police officer's mother was appalled. "No one, not even a police officer, is above the law!" she wrote in a letter to the editor. Fully expecting to receive hate mail.

Is it possible, these days, to risk attempting a civil conversation about immigration? Yet, immigrants and refugees are also God's beloved children.

How do we open ourselves to opportunities, to situations we might not so easily notice? To those whose experiences, whose cultures, language or politics might be different from ours? What would it take to break out of our own bubble? Where are we called to be more aware, especially of injustice? And what does it mean to love our neighbor in the midst of the current climate?

Our basic identity as baptized Christians binds us together as a community

of Jesus' followers. Disciples. Called in the Spirit. To live as Jesus lived. Bathed in God's love. Strengthened at the Eucharistic table. And so we pray, "Open our eyes, O Lord, that we might behold the wondrous things out of your law...Give us understanding that we may keep your law with our whole heart."