

Ordinary Time 6A 2014

The Perfect Measure of the Christian Life

For the past few weeks our gospels have come from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The great Saint Augustine called this sermon "the perfect measure of the Christian life," by which he meant that the sermon is the norm against which we should to measure our Christian life. (1) If we want to know what kind of Christians we are, we ought to measure who we are against the Sermon on the Mount. (2) If we want to know how we should act, we should measure our behavior against the Sermon on the Mount. (3) If we want to know if we are growing in the Christian life, we should measure our growth by the Sermon on the Mount.

This sermon is about action, about doing something, about keeping God's commandments with a joyful and generous heart. And so at the beginning of today's gospel Jesus tell us he did not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them. Jesus has a deep and abiding love for God's law because God's law teaches us to live in the way God created to live: a way of love, a way of joy, a way that leads to life with God. Therefore, those who break the least of the commandments will be least in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus comes to fulfill the law and the commandments. He comes to do God's law with a generous heart so that we can do the same. He does not come to be

served but to serve and give his life so that we may live. Jesus takes on the sufferings of our human condition so that we can enjoy God's own life. Jesus observes God's law in a way that is the perfect expression of love. This is why he tells us that if we want to enter the kingdom of heaven we must practice a greater righteousness by living in a way that gets at the deeper meaning of God's law.

Jesus teaches us how to live the Ten Commandments in a new and generous way. For example, the fifth commandment says we should not kill, but Jesus says we must go to the root of the commandment and avoid the angry word and insulting comment that leads to murder. The sixth commandment tells us not to commit adultery, but Jesus says we must go to the root of the commandment and avoid the lustful thought and those occasions that lead us to adultery. We must go beyond words of the commandment to the heart of the commandment.

Jesus is not teaching a new set of commandments but a new attitude, a new way of approaching God, a way of living that is generous and joyful because it brings us to the fullness of God's life. Jesus encourages us to go beyond formal observance of the law and seek the deeper meaning of the law. And so, if the commandment says do not steal we must avoid the envy that leads us to steal. If the commandment says honor father and mother we must cultivate the love that leads to such honor.

Imagine what our life would be like if the measure of our life was the Sermon on the Mount. Imagine a Christian life in which we go beyond the minimum requirements of the law to the inner meaning of the law. Imagine a Christian life in which we live as Christ lived by doing God's law out love. Such a life would make us the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Such a life would make us perfect disciples of Jesus. Such a life would bring us the inward peace we so desperately seek.

Take some time to read the Sermon on the Mount this week, chapter 5-7 in the Gospel of Matthew. Read the Sermon and measure yourself against Jesus' words.