

# COLUMNISTS

## Actions grow out of inner choices

**Sixth Sunday of the Year:** (R3) Matthew 5:17-37. (R1) Sirach 15:15-20. (R2) 1 Corinthians 2:6-10.

Sunday's readings are about commandments, laws. Sirach says two things about laws.

First, we are free; that is, we can choose. Freedom is the power to choose. "If you choose ..."

Secondly, he says we are responsible; that is, answerable for our actions. There are only two choices in life: We can choose fire or water, that which destroys or that which nourishes. We can choose life or death, that which makes life worth living or that which makes a living life worthless. We can go to heaven or go to hell. It is up to our choices: Keep the commandments and live, or don't and die.

In the Gospel our Lord explains the Law. Two things stand out in his explanation.

First, his authority. To the Jew the Law was from God. It was divine. Yet four times Jesus dared to correct the inadequacies of the Law. "You have heard that it was said ... But I say to you." Not even the prophets dared to tamper with the Law. Yet Jesus did — claiming implicitly that he was greater than any prophet.

Orchestras that played under Arturo Toscanini said that the moment he mounted the rostrum, you could feel the authority flowing from him. So it was with Jesus — the authority was there; the people felt it, thus no one questioned



a word  
for  
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

him. St. Matthew wrote: "The people were astounded because he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes and Pharisees."

Secondly, Jesus pointed out that the heart of the Law is the heart. Our Lord was saying that laws have two sides: an outer and an inner side, what it says and what it means, the letter and the spirit. Our Lord was saying that the spirit of the law is the heart of the law. Laws, you see, regulate exterior actions only so that people can live in harmony together. Laws do not touch the heart. A citizen can keep the laws of society and still be a very bad person. The Pharisees were like that.

The world judges a person by what he does; God judges a person by what he is, by what he thinks, feels and does. As a jeweler judges the worth of a watch by its inner works, so God judges our worth by the inner movements of our minds and hearts. Thus Jesus laid the axe at the

root: Don't murder — better, don't even think of it. Don't nurse feelings of bitterness or resentment inside. Bitterness breeds bitterness; hatred breeds more hatred. To allow feelings of bitterness and resentment to fester in our lives will eventually destroy us. So Jesus wants us to conquer not just the act, but the inner emotion.

Commit adultery? Jesus said don't even harbor lustful thoughts and x-rated desires.

If religion were only keeping laws, it would be far too easy. It is easy to go to Mass on Sunday, but to love your enemies, to forgive the unlovable — ah, that is, a different story.

Life is a game of checkers. As your moves determine the outcome of the game, so your choices determine the outcome of your life.

William James said this about the effects of choices:

Sow a thought and reap an act;  
Sow an act and reap a habit;  
Sow a habit and reap a character;  
Sow a character and reap a destiny.

Sirach speaks about choices; but Jesus admonishes that our choices must be the expression of what is in our hearts.

"Things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, defile. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, unchastity, theft, false witness, blasphemy. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile" (Matthew 15:18-20).

President Calvin Coolidge died in 1933. Dorothy Parker, unhappy with his do-nothing presidency, commented when she heard about his death, "How can they tell?"

Can people tell whether or not we are Catholic? Do we keep only the letter of the Law or the spirit? Do we seek to get to the heart of the Law, our heart? Like the Psalmist do we pray: "Create a clean heart in me, O God; put in me a steadfast spirit?"

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Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

### Daily Readings

**Monday, February 15**

Genesis 4:1-15, 25; Mark 8:11-13

**Tuesday, February 16**

Genesis 6:5-8, 7:1-5, 10; Mark 8:14-21

**Wednesday, February 17**

Joel 2:12-18; 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2;

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

**Thursday, February 18**

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Luke 9:22-25

**Friday, February 19**

Isaiah 58:1-9; Matthew 9:14-15

**Saturday, February 20**

Isaiah 58:9-14; Luke 5:27-32



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