

FATHER MARK SCHULTE
HOMILY
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“Change of Heart”

My Brothers and Sisters, in the Gospel Jesus continues His Sermon on the Mount address by saying, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law, but instead to fulfill it.” The Mosaic Law addressed many things in the life of the Jew: worship, dietary, and moral. But in this context Jesus is speaking primarily about the ten commandments that Moses received from God on Mt. Sinai (Mt 5:17-37) (CCC 2052-2557).

At the heart of most of the problems in the world today is the failure to live according to the ten commandments by many if not most people. In our country it was a grave mistake to remove the commandments from our court houses, schools, and other public places. That act became a rejection of our God who gave us this great land. Jesus said that the commandments will always be relevant and in effect, even if we attempt to remove them from our public spaces, because ultimately God has written the law upon our hearts, where they cannot be erased (Jer 31:33) (2 Cor 3:3) (CCC 1958).

But in addressing the people on the mountain, Jesus takes the law, the commandments to another level beyond that typically understood by the Jews of His day. Jesus will address the heart of the law and not only its mere letter, beyond the formality of keeping the commandments, and down to their essence.

Our ultimate goal is salvation, and salvation will require a transformation of the heart. Jesus gives a number of examples but let’s just look at two of them for now. Jesus said, “You have heard the commandment You shall not kill, but what I say to you is.” In saying this Jesus is revealing Himself as the supreme law giver and as God. Each law has its own cause, effect, and solution. The chief priests and pharisees primarily address the letter of the law itself and its effect. For example, the commandment “You shall not kill,” is the letter of the law, and the effect of breaking that law is murder. But Jesus goes on to emphasize the cause for breaking the law and He gives the solution for avoiding it as well. He said you shall not even be angry with someone. Anger is the cause. The solution is reconciliation with our neighbor. Therefore, unless the heart is transformed the desire to kill remains. The Our Father prayer addresses this in a very simple yet profound way when we ask God to forgive us our transgressions as we forgive those who trespass against us.

The second example is the commandment not to commit adultery. The effect of transgressing this law is adultery. The cause is lust in the heart. The solution is keeping custody of the eyes and removing all forms of temptation. When a person does this their heart has been transformed. Thus, Jesus goes beyond the mere letter of the law and gets to the heart of the matter. For a true conversion to happen the causes of sin and the solution to avoid sin must be addressed. God knows every sentiment of the

heart. Psalm 51 reminds us that God is seeking a heart that is humble and contrite. For this to happen one must progress beyond just merely keeping the letter of the law. A real transformation of the heart must take place and this requires the grace of God and a firm commitment to fulfill the Will of God. Once again we see that in the Our Father prayer we pray “Thy Will be done”. It becomes God’s will above our own will.

And so how does this transformation of the heart come about? Through prayer, fasting and a firm commitment to do all that is necessary to avoid sin. Lent is coming soon and it is the perfect time to begin a complete cleansing of the heart. This can start with a good examination of our conscience. Remove those aspects of our lives that cause us to sin; lust, anger, jealousy, insults, and the lack of charity in all its various forms.

In the Gospel Jesus speaks frankly about a place called “Gehenna”. Gehenna is a reference to the fires of hell. The unrepentant sinner who dies in that state will be consigned to hell. Hell is a very real place. Hell should scare the HE _ _ out of us thus moving us to seek God’s forgiveness. Plan to go to confession at least twice during the seasons of Lent and Easter. Don’t put it off. None of us know if God will grant us tomorrow.

NOTE: CCC = Catechism of the Catholic Church