

7-11-2022

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time - 12 February 2023

Joe Tedesco

Follow this and additional works at: <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/pastoral-liturgy>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Tedesco, Joe. "Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time - 12 February 2023." *Pastoral Liturgy* 53, no. 1 (2022): 1-6.
<https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/pastoral-liturgy/vol53/iss1/29>

This Liturgical Resource is brought to you by ResearchOnline@ND. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pastoral Liturgy by an authorized administrator of ResearchOnline@ND. For more information, please contact researchonline@nd.edu.au.





12 February 2023

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Joe Tedesco

Introduction

Jesus' presence attests to the benevolent wisdom of God's law. However, following the Law is not simply about external behaviour. It rests on an attitude of the heart.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you are the wisdom of God. Lord have mercy.

You came to complete the Law of God. Christ have mercy.

You direct us to the Father. Lord have mercy.

Collect

The oration

O God, who teach us that you abide

in hearts that are just and true,

grant that we may be so fashioned by your grace

as to become a dwelling pleasing to you.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

God, for ever and ever and ever.

It is not too surprising to find that our prayer first served as a collect for the feast of the Ascension. This original setting brings to the fore the deep biblical resonances that are at the core of the oration. The use of 'abide' is a clear reference back to the Gospel of John (Jn 6:57, Jn 15:5-7), and expresses God's promise to remain in the heart of believers. Abiding in God's love involves keeping the commandments, inclusive of sharing with the poor: *but if anyone has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need, how does God's love abide in that person* (1 Jn 3:17). The language of God's indwelling is taken from St Paul. It designates Christ's presence by faith (Eph 3:17), the presence of the Spirit (Rom 8:8-9), the presence of Christ's word (Col 3:11) and power (2 Cor 12:9). By contrast, without Christ, sin dwells in the

inner depths of the human person (Rom 7:17-19). Rather, the people in whom God abides are characterized by hearts that are just and true. Yet their right deeds are only in harmony with God's will on account of the fashioning of divine grace. The prayer exemplifies the community's faith in the power of God's word, which teaches that God will abide and brings this about.

Acknowledgement

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

First Reading

Sirach 15:15–20

Fire and water; one burns, the other quenches. The contrast is clear, and we are in a blessed position, aided with the wisdom of God, to be able to recognise that contrast and reach out to that which gives life.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 119(118):1–2, 4–5, 17–18, 33–34. R. v. 1

Happy are they who follow the law of the Lord!

Today's selection of verses come from a long acrostic Psalm that praises the Lord for giving the people of God such marvellous instructions and dictates to live by.

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 2:6–10

We hear a continuation of teaching from Corinthians where Paul compares the attractive philosophies of the day with the sort of wisdom of God that goes beyond any human understanding. Yet, it is a wisdom available to us through the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 5:17–37 or Matthew 5:20–22, 27–28, 33–34, 37

The more difficult parts of the Sermon on the Mount become apparent in today's reading from Matthew. A collection of six instances of the Law of Moses (four this Sunday, two next) are taken by Jesus and presented in a way that call us to deep and authentic goodness.

Reflection

This week's selection from the Sermon on the Mount, particularly in its longer form, takes in a number of teachings that pertain to the Law. Known as the Torah in the

Hebrew, the Law is still regarded as the heart of the Jewish Scriptures and of the Christian Old Testament. Today's Gospel reading starts with a remarkable statement that Jesus has come not to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to ensure that every stroke is fulfilled and that not even one of these commandments should be considered disposed of – none can be infringed by those seeking to live in the kingdom of God (vv. 17-19). As if to underline the point, the opening finishes with the statement that 'unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (v. 20).

Wow! What extraordinary words. The scribes and Pharisees are presented in all sorts of ways in the Gospels, but what is always recognised is that they were experts in the Law. They wrestled, deliberated, taught and sought to apply the Law better than anybody else. So, at a quick glance, are we being told that followers of Christ are supposed to hold to the entirety of the Law, with all its intricate commands and directives better than the experts of the day?

There is much to unpack and we cannot possibly do it all here, but there are some important layers that may help us navigate our way through. Firstly, we should resist assuming that what Jesus means is literal application with little or no interpretive understanding. A pointer in that direction is the fact that what follows Jesus' opening statements are many verses where Jesus himself deliberates and interprets various precepts of the Law.

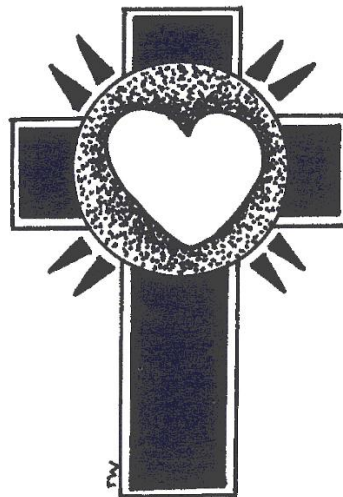
More significantly, Jesus points out that nothing of the Law has been removed or superseded with his coming. However, that does not equate (as some might assume) that the coming of Christ requires a legalistic implementation of the Torah. Rather, it is likely that Jesus is attempting to draw attention to a fuller understanding of the Law. Firstly, there is the inner disposition that Jesus is clearly pointing to that matters as much if not more than any external action. However, there is also a broader context at play. The Law is part of a story of relationship between a God who saves and a people seeking freedom from bondage and a life of promise. The Torah, we recall, was given to the chosen people not simply because God loves to be a rule giver but, rather, because God wanted the Hebrew people to retain their freedom, to become a people of God and become a people who could enjoy life in the Promised Land. To put it succinctly, the Law only makes sense within the context of the loving relationship within which it was founded.

So, the letter of the law, every 'stroke and dot' does not simply mean what it seems in a literal sense. Rather, it means every layer of meaning and depth of relationship within which the Law sits. It is a relationship that is the story of Israel and continues to be the story of Jews and Christians to this day. So, yes, naturally Jesus does not come to destroy such a Law. Jesus is the continuation of it, the way through which we as a people continue to move from bondage to freedom. From a life in chains to life in all its glory.

Much is often made of the high moral standard that seems to be demanded when navigating the Sermon on the Mount, and especially the parts that we are hearing today. However, there is equally a deep relationship that Jesus is inviting people to and an infinitely gracious God that is asking us to hold to such teaching. As Ben

Sirach in the first reading indicates, we can grasp the commandments as a matter of choice. However, it is not entirely up to us and our own strength. The second reading speaks of a wisdom that is beyond any wisdom of this age. A gift of the Holy Spirit that probes even the depths of God is availed to those who love God. This Spirit helps us recognise and actualise the good that is otherwise beyond us. The Spirit will always aid us to take steps to form those inner convictions to act justly, lovingly and truthfully.

Jesus has not so much come to fulfill the Law in a legalistic sense as some magistrate or promulgator of legal code demanding adherence. Jesus has come to fulfill and complete it by his very presence with us. When we receive the Eucharist, we are being nourished with Jesus' very body. When we received our baptism, we were gifted with the Holy Spirit to empower us to navigate the difficult challenging choices we sometimes confront. Further, even when we get it wrong, there is the constant mercy of God and the gift of reconciliation allowing us to overcome even the greatest misstep. God has created a sacramental universe and God's aiding presence is entwined right through every human experience and 'every letter of the Law' is not extraneous to it. We truly can say, as Ben Sirach attests, 'how great is the wisdom of God' (15:15) in allowing us to know and navigate the good life with Jesus, the fulfilment of the Law, always at our side.



Mt 5:24

Be reconciled
with each other.

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

God has prepared blessings for us that are greater than the mind can imagine. Therefore, let us with confidence bring our needs and the needs of our world before God.

Petitions

We pray that all the leaders of the Church may clearly proclaim the Gospel of the Lord and instil into all people the confidence to choose the way of life over the way of death. May synodality be the goal of all the Church.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray that political and business leaders may let God's word shine upon their policies and decisions and guide them to be generous in their service of those in need.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray that those who are at the beginning of life or at the end of life. May their fragility be respected so that they might live with dignity all the days of their lives.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those preparing for the sacrament of marriage that they may find strength and joy in the will of God for themselves and for their families.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who have returned to work and school after the holiday period. May they be mindful of the blessings of rest and enter into their duties with enthusiasm and joy.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray that the sick may experience the consolation of God's strength, and that those who have died may enter into the light of divine glory.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

We pray with confidence that our prayers will be answered as we strive to keep faithful to the way of life Christ taught us. Through the power of the Spirit and in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, who is Lord forever and ever.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVK	GA	CWB	CWBII
A new commandment					615	443
Eye has not seen	146			466		
Forgive our sins					680	120
Grant to us, O Lord				303	698	291
Here I am, Lord	90			496		518
How rich are the depths of God				81	795	505
I heard the voice of Jesus say	54			468		512
Jesus Christ is waiting		8		507		
Lord of creation, to you be all praise				423	739	543
Love Divine, all loves excelling				463	740	552
O God, your people gather					768	574
Praise to the Holiest in the height				410	791	585
Praise the Lord! You heavens adore him				409	790	583
The Church of Christ, in every age					818	613
The hound of heaven		79		81	795	505
This is my will, my one command				465	842	626
We live and love your word			118			571
What does the Lord require?						642

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 118: *Happy are they who follow the law of the Lord!*

	CWB	JOBA	LPA
Psalm 118	364	pg. 60	pg. 92