

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year A

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time—A

Reading 1

Sirach 15:15-20

If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will save you;
if you trust in God, you too shall live;
he has set before you fire and water
to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand.
Before man are life and death, good and evil,
whichever he chooses shall be given him.
Immense is the wisdom of the Lord;
he is mighty in power, and all-seeing.
The eyes of God are on those who fear him;
he understands man's every deed.
No one does he command to act unjustly,
to none does he give license to sin.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 119:1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34

R. (1b) Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!

Blessed are they whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the LORD.

Blessed are they who observe his decrees,
who seek him with all their heart.

R. Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!

You have commanded that your precepts
be diligently kept.

Oh, that I might be firm in the ways
of keeping your statutes!

R. Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!

Be good to your servant, that I may live
and keep your words.

Open my eyes, that I may consider
the wonders of your law.

R. Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!

Instruct me, O LORD, in the way of your statutes,
that I may exactly observe them.

Give me discernment, that I may observe your law
and keep it with all my heart.

R. Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!

Reading 2

1 Corinthians 2:6-10

Brothers and sisters:

We speak a wisdom to those who are mature,
not a wisdom of this age,
nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away.
Rather, we speak God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden,
which God predetermined before the ages for our glory,
and which none of the rulers of this age knew;
for, if they had known it,
they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
But as it is written:

*What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard,
and what has not entered the human heart,
what God has prepared for those who love him,
this God has revealed to us through the Spirit.*

For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God.

Alleluia

cf. Matthew 11:25

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth;
you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Gospel

Matthew 5:17-37

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away,

not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter

will pass from the law,

until all things have taken place.

Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments
and teaches others to do so

will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments

will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses

that of the scribes and Pharisees,

you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

"You have heard that it was said to your ancestors,

You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.

But I say to you,

whoever is angry with his brother

will be liable to judgment;

and whoever says to his brother, 'Raqa,'

will be answerable to the Sanhedrin;

Gospel (Continued)

Matthew 5:17-37

and whoever says, 'You fool,'
will be liable to fiery Gehenna.
Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar,
and there recall that your brother
has anything against you,
leave your gift there at the altar,
go first and be reconciled with your brother,
and then come and offer your gift.
Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court.
Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge,
and the judge will hand you over to the guard,
and you will be thrown into prison.
Amen, I say to you,
you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.

"You have heard that it was said,
You shall not commit adultery.
But I say to you,
everyone who looks at a woman with lust
has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
If your right eye causes you to sin,
tear it out and throw it away.
It is better for you to lose one of your members
than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna.
And if your right hand causes you to sin,
cut it off and throw it away.
It is better for you to lose one of your members
than to have your whole body go into Gehenna.

"It was also said,
Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce.
But I say to you,
whoever divorces his wife - unless the marriage is unlawful -
causes her to commit adultery,
and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

"Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors,
Do not take a false oath,
but make good to the Lord all that you vow.
But I say to you, do not swear at all;
not by heaven, for it is God's throne;
nor by the earth, for it is his footstool;
nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.
Do not swear by your head,
for you cannot make a single hair white or black.
Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.'
Anything more is from the evil one."

Exegesis

Sirach 15:15-20

Sirach was promulgated approximately 180 years before Christ. It was written in Hebrew by a man named Ben Sira who was a Jewish person living in Jerusalem. *Sirach* gets its name from the transliteration of the Hebrew name *Sira* into the Greek *Sirach*. The book was translated into Greek by Ben Sira's grandson several years later.

Ben Sira was a well-educated Jew who dedicated his life to a study of the Law and the Prophets. He was a highly respected scribe and teacher, who ran an academy for young Jewish men.¹ He was concerned with the growing Hellenistic influence on the people and in particular its negative influence on orthodox Jewish Religion. He viewed the influence as a dilution of authentic fidelity to Yahweh.

Sirach is a beautiful collection of wisdom and poetry. The original title in Hebrew was *The Wisdom of Yeshua (Jesus) ben (son of) Eleazar ben Sira*.² *Sirach* begins "Praise of Wisdom. All wisdom comes from the Lord and with him it remains forever... Before all things else, wisdom was created, and prudent understanding from eternity. To whom has wisdom's root been revealed? Who knows her subtleties? There is but one, wise and truly awe-inspiring, seated upon his throne: It is the Lord; he created her... He has poured her forth upon all his works." (Sir 1: 1-8). In contrast with Greek philosophy which viewed wisdom as a human attribute flowing from within, *Sirach* reveals wisdom as a gift from God. God is the creator and the source of wisdom, and He chooses to pour out His wisdom upon creation. "With wisdom and knowledge, He fills them; good and evil He shows them." (Sir 17: 6).

Our pericope is selected from a section that is titled *Man's Free Will* in the NAB. It is introduced by the previous verse. "When God, in the beginning, created man, He made him subject to his own free choice." (Sir 15: 14).

If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will save you; if you trust in God, you too shall live; he has set before you fire and water to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand. The phrase that is translated in this verse as *trust in God* is derived from the Greek word *pistis*. The word carries with it our common understanding of the word *faith*. It means a system of beliefs that we hold and profess. It means trust and confidence. It means loyalty, fidelity and assurance. As it is portrayed throughout Sacred Scripture it takes on an even deeper meaning. It connotes a deep, abiding, personal relationship of love, even a sharing of life. This deep abiding relationship is made possible by the justification that comes from the dying and rising of Jesus. By the Paschal Mystery we are set free to enter this communion of love with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed, "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word so that they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they may also be in Us." (Jn 17: 20-21).

Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him. Immense is the wisdom of the Lord; he is mighty in power, and all-seeing. The eyes of God are on those who fear him; he understands man's every deed. No one does he command to act unjustly, to none does he give license to sin. The Greek word that is translated as *life* in this verse is *zoe*. *Zoe* describes life in the Spirit. *Zoe* is the word that John used in his Gospel and in his letters to describe the fullness of life that Jesus talked about, life that comes from above and is eternal. There is another word for *life* in the Greek language, *bios*, that describes biological life. The Greek word that is translated as *wisdom* in this verse is *sophia*. *Sophia* here describes a greater wisdom than human wisdom, the wisdom of Greek philosophy. This is a mighty wisdom that comes from God. It is mighty (*ischyros*) and powerful (*dynasteia*) and all-seeing (*blepo*). *Blepo* can mean all-seeing in terms of physical sight but also describes the power of *awareness* and *perception*. Both *Proverbs* and *Hebrews* speak of this omniscient power of God. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." (Prov 15: 3). "No creature is concealed from Him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must render an account." (Heb 4: 13).

This passage from *Sirach* restates the well-known passage from *Deuteronomy*. "I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, heeding His voice, and holding fast to Him. For that will mean life for you, a long life for you to live on the land which the Lord swore He would give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." (Deut 30: 19-20).

1. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy; The New Jerome Biblical Commentary; P.H.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; page 498.

2. Ibid.

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 119:1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the psalter, consisting of 176 verses. It is titled *A Prayer to God, the Lawgiver* in the NAB and *Your Word Is a Lamp to My Feet* in the ESV. The author is giving thanks and praise to God for the gift of His laws and precepts, giving us guidelines to live by. The psalm is an acrostic poem of twenty-two stanzas, following the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Psalm 119, like Psalm 112, begins very similar to Psalm 1. The first two verses of Psalm 1 are as follows: “Blessed (ashre/makarios) are those who do not follow the counsel of the wicked, nor go the way of sinners, nor sit in the company of scoffers. Rather, the law of the Lord is their joy.” (Ps 1: 1-2).

Blessed are they whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they who observe his decrees, who seek him with all their heart.

The word *blessed* is a translation of the Hebrew word *ashre*. The LXX translates *ashre* as *makarios*. (See the exegesis from Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time for a discussion on *ashre/makarios*.) The psalm begins with a declaration of praise for the Lord. Then it moves to a series of beatitudes for those who live in right relationship with the Lord.

The Hebrew word that is translated as *Lord* in this verse and throughout the psalm is *Yahweh*. The Hebrew word that is translated as *law* is *torah*. *Torah* is typically translated into English as *law* as it is here. In Jewish understanding, however, *torah* has a connotation of *instruction* or *teaching*. It can also be translated as *rule* or *direction*. *Law* has a more negative or restrictive connotation in the English translation than *torah* warrants. The Hebrew word that is translated as *decrees* in this verse is *edut*. *Edut* is translated as *testimonies* in the ESV. *Edut* can also be translated as *witness*, *laws*, *warning* or *reminder*.

Proverbs describes how God delights in those who walk blamelessly with Him. “The depraved in heart are an abomination to the Lord, but those who walk blamelessly are His delight.” (Prov 11: 20). *Second Chronicles* assures us that God is present to those who seek Him. “The Lord is with you when you are with Him, and if you seek Him He will be present to you.” (2 Chr 15: 2).

You have commanded that your precepts be diligently kept. Oh, that I might be firm in the ways of keeping your statutes! The Hebrew word that is translated as *precepts* in this verse is *piqqudim*. *Piqqudim* appears earlier in the psalter. “The precepts (*piqqudim*) of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the command of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.” (Ps 19: 8).

Be good to your servant, that I may live and keep your words. Open my eyes, that I may consider the wonders of your law. The Hebrew word that is translated as *good* in this verse is *gamal*. *Gamal* appears in Psalm 13, and the ESV translates it as *bountiful*. “I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully (*gamal*) with me.” (Ps 13: 6). The Hebrew word that is translated as *law* in this verse *torah*. The word *torah* in Hebrew holds more of a connotation of *teaching* or *instruction*.

Instruct me, O LORD, in the way of your statutes, that I may exactly observe them. Give me discernment, that I may observe your law and keep it with all my heart. “For the Lord gives wisdom, from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.” (Prov 2: 6).

Exegesis (Continued)

1 Corinthians 2:6-10

For an introduction to *1 Corinthians* see the exegesis over the past several weeks. Our pericope is selected from a passage that is titled *The True Wisdom* in the NAB, and *True Wisdom of God* in the RSV. In the interpretation of this passage, it is important to bear in mind the pervasive Hellenistic influences in Corinth at the time, and the admiration that it allotted to human wisdom, *sophia*. James describes merely human wisdom as follows: “Wisdom of this kind does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” (James 3: 15). Paul speaks of those touting merely human wisdom as infants in Christ. “Brothers, I could not talk to you as spiritual people, but as fleshy people, as infants in Christ.” (1 Cor 3: 1).

Brothers and sisters: We speak a wisdom to those who are mature, not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away. The Greek word that is translated as *wisdom* in this passage is *sophia*. The Greek word that is translated as *mature* is *teleios*. *Teleios* is the same word that Jesus used in Matthew 5:48. “So be perfect (*teleios*) just as your Heavenly Father is perfect (*teleios*).” (Mt. 5: 48). At its root, the word *teleios* means to reach completion or the maturity that its maker has created and intended it to be. Humanity was created out of love, for love. Reaching the fullness of *agape* love is to reach perfection in Christ Jesus.

Rather, we speak God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory, and which none of the rulers of this age knew; for, if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. Again in this verse *sophia* is the Greek word that is translated as *wisdom*. *Sophia* appears 17 times in this short letter and 51 times in the entire NT. *Sophia* appears 139 times in the LXX. The Hebrew equivalent to the Greek word *sophia* is *hakmah*. Earlier in *1 Corinthians* St. Paul states clearly that Jesus, the Word made Flesh, is the personification of Wisdom from God: “Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” (1 Cor 1: 24). *Sophia* is likened in Sacred Scripture to the preexistent Logos existing in eternity. “Wisdom (*hakmah/sophia*) sings her own praises... From the mouth of the Most High (Yahweh) I (*Hakmah/Sophia*) came forth, and mist like covered the earth... Before all ages, in the beginning He (Yahweh) created me, and through all ages I shall not cease to be.” (Sir 24: 1, 3, 9). “The Lord begot me (*hakmah/sophia*), the firstfruits of His ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago; from of old I was poured forth, at the first, before the earth.” (Prov 8: 22-23). Through Him all things came into being. Through Him all things were fashioned. “Such things as are hidden I learned, and such as are plain; for Wisdom (*Hakmah/Sophia*), the artificer of all, taught me.” (Wis 7: 22). *Sophia* is associated with the work of the Holy Spirit: “Or who ever knew your counsel, except You had given Wisdom (*Sophia*) and sent Your Holy Spirit from on high?” (Wis 9: 17). *Sophia* is embodied in the human being living in righteousness. “Therefore, I teach you the statutes and decrees as the Lord, my God, has commanded me, that you may observe them in the land you are entering to occupy. Observe them carefully, for thus will you give evidence of your wisdom (*hakmah*) and intelligence to the nations, who will hear of all these statutes and say, ‘This great nation is truly a wise (*hakam*) and intelligent people.’” (Deut 4: 5-6). Paul goes on to say that we are called to speak God’s wisdom.

But as it is written: What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him, this God has revealed to us through the Spirit. In this beautiful quotation Paul is drawing from the Prophet Isaiah. “No ear has ever heard, no eye has ever seen, any God but You doing such deeds for those who wait for Him.” (Is 64: 3). “Lo, I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the things of the past shall not be remembered or come to mind.” (Is 65: 17). James describes what awaits those who love God. “Blessed is the man who perseveres in temptation, for when he has been proved he will receive the crown of life that He promised to those who love Him.” (James 1: 12).

For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God. The only way to truly know God is through the Holy Spirit living within the depth of our souls.

Exegesis (Continued)

Matthew 5:17-37

Our Gospel pericope today is a continuation of the famous teaching of Jesus that we call the *Sermon on the Mountain*. It begins with a consistent theme of *Matthew*, that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. The expression *Law and the Prophets*, essentially refers to the entire OT, at least as Matthew uses the phrase. In ordinary Jewish thought, the OT included the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. The early Church Fathers saw the presence of the pre-existing Logos throughout the OT. Jesus, the Word made Flesh, is the personification of the Word of God.

*Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. The disciples would include the twelve apostles, His followers in the crowd before Him. The Greek word that is translated in this verse as abolish is *katalyo*, which means to destroy, demolish, do away with, destroy, or invalidate. The Greek word that is translated as fulfill is *pleroo*. *Pleroo* means to fulfill, complete, or cause or make to happen. Matthew first uses this word in the infancy narrative. "All this took place to fulfill (*pleroo*) what the Lord had said through the Prophet: 'Behold the virgin shall be with child and bear a Son, and they shall name Him Emmanuel,' which means *God is with us*." (Mt 1: 23). (See also Mt 2: 6, 15; 4:14-16).*

Strict adherence to the Law was essential in Jewish thought. "Therefore, the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes in fear of the Lord, our God, that we may always have a prosperous and happy life as we have today; and our justice before the Lord, our God, is to consist in carefully observing all these commandments He has enjoined on us." (Deut 6: 24-25). "If you would harken to My commandments, your prosperity would be like a river, and your vindication like the waves of the sea; your descendants would be like the sand, and those born of your stock like its grains, their name never cut off or blotted from My presence." (Is 48: 18-19). "The grass withers and the flower wilts, the word of God stands forever." (Is 40: 8). The Jewish people of Palestine standing before Jesus were still bound by God's commandments.

St. Paul taught that not only Christ was the fulfillment of the Law, but it is our calling as well with the help of the Holy Spirit, to become the fulfillment (*pleroo*) of the Law. "For Christ is the end (*telos*) of the law for the justification of everyone who has faith." (Rom 10: 4). *Telos* can also be translated as *completion* or *fulfillment*. "For the law, weakened by the flesh, was powerless to do, this God has done: by sending His own Son in the likeness of human flesh and for the sake of sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous decree of the law might be fulfilled (*pleroo*) in us, who live not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (Rom 8: 3-4). "Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another, for one who loves another has fulfilled (*pleroo*) the law." (Rom 13: 8).

*Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place. Matthew uses the expression *heaven and earth pass away*, to describe the coming of the Kingdom of God in all its fullness. In His eschatological teaching Jesus uses this expression to assure us that He will surpass this event. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away." (Mt 24: 35). The *smallest letter* is a translation of the Greek word *iota*. *Iota* is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *yodah*, which is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The expression *part of a letter* is the translation of the Greek word *keraiia*. *Keraiia* is referring to a small *dot* that was used to distinguish one Hebrew letter from another. The point is that Jesus came to abolish not even the smallest part of God's statutes.*

*I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus was critical of the scribes and the Pharisees for imposing additional laws and statutes upon the people and not observing them themselves. The Greek word *dikaioisyne* that is translated here as *righteousness* is a very significant word in Sacred Scripture. *Dikaioisyne* can also be translated as *justice*, or *fulfillment of the law*. The Prophet Jeremiah foretold that the gifts of the Messiah would be*

Exegesis (Continued)

Matthew 5:17-37

righteousness, sanctification and redemption. “Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; as king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is right and just in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security. This the name they will give him: ‘Lord of justice.’” (Jer 23: 5-6). The word *dikaioyne* appears 92 times in the NT and 344 times in the LXX. The Hebrew equivalent is *sedaquah*. *Sedaquah/dikaioyne* is about being in right relationship with God, especially important is being connected to God in faith and trust. In Sacred Scripture *sedaquah* is first attributed to Father Abraham referencing God’s covenant with him. “And he (Abraham) believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness (*sedaquah*). (Gen 15: 6). St. Paul points to Abraham as a model of faith. “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” (Rom 4: 3). Jesus points to the righteousness of the Father. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.” (Mt 6: 33). Jesus teaches us that righteousness is necessary to attain eternal life. “And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Mt 25: 46). St. Paul challenges us to pursue righteousness. “So, turn from youthful desires and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord.” (2 Tim 2: 22). St. Peter warns that many will suffer because of our righteousness with the Lord. “But even if you should suffer because of righteousness (*dikaioyne*), blessed are you.” (1 Pt 3: 14). Due to their hypocrisy many of the scribes and Pharisees were not in a right relationship with God.

What follows in Jesus’ *Sermon on the Mountain* is what is commonly referred to as the *six antitheses*. The pattern is basically the same. They begin with “*You have heard that it was said to your ancestors,*” and is followed by the phrase, “*but I say to you...*” The antitheses cover the following: anger, lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and love of enemies. In each of the six teachings Jesus goes to the root of the commandment and challenges us to go deeper. Much like the *Beatitudes* we are called with the help of the Holy Spirit to live our lives on a higher level of being, to rise above the letter of the law. Our selected passage covers the first four of the six antitheses, anger, lust, divorce, and oaths. Jesus puts before us contrasts between the Law, the Torah, and this new way of living the commandments. They at first can seem to be a contrast, but it is important to consider that Jesus just informed us that He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets and not abolish them. The contrast then must be interpreted in that light. Jesus is teaching us what it means to fulfill the spirit of the Law.

“You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment. But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; and whoever says to his brother, ‘Raga,’ will be answerable to the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ will be liable to fiery Gehenna. St. John sums this up in his first letter. “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him.” (1 Jn 3: 15). The root of murder is anger and hate.

“You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” The root cause of adultery is lust. Adultery was forbidden under the Mosaic Law as articulated in Ex 20:14 and Deut 5:18.

“It was also said, Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce. But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife - unless the marriage is unlawful - causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” Deut 24: 1-4 explains the rules for divorce under the Law. Jesus recognizes divorce as a reality of our fallen world. “Jesus said to them, ‘Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.’” (Mt 19: 8)

“Again, you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow.” “You shall not swear falsely by My name, thus profaning the name of your God. I am the Lord.” (Lev 19: 12).

Reflection

The great Greek philosopher, Socrates once said, “The un-reflected life is not worth living.” As I look at the world today, I see many people living on the surface of life. Most people, it seems to me, are existing, and not really living, going through the motions of life, caught up in day-to-day activities without ever reflecting on the deeper meaning of life. In our readings this weekend, God is challenging us to go deeper. God is challenging us to go into the depth of our being to discover our true selves.

In our first reading from the Book of Sirach, God is reminding us that we are free. God has set before us good and evil, life and death. Which do we choose? Why do we make the decisions that we make? We have within us the seeds of good and the seeds of evil. Which seeds do we plant and water, and why? These are the questions that we are asked to ponder this weekend.

The seeds of evil are within us because of the effects of original sin. It is a part of our fallen human nature. When we find ourselves doing things that we know we should not be doing, when we find ourselves doing things that we don't even want to do, we say that we know better. Yet, we find ourselves doing them non-the-less. This moment should cause us to pause and look deeper into our hearts and get at the root of the problem. In our Gospel this weekend Jesus challenges us to look for these underlying causes of our outward actions. If you choose to kill, Jesus asks, “Why do you hate?” To eliminate our outward actions, we must first confront our deepest thoughts and emotions.

In our second reading, St. Paul talks of an inner Wisdom, not wisdom of this age, or of the rulers of this age, but God's Wisdom, mysterious and hidden. This Wisdom is available to us as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that dwells deep within us. It is a Wisdom that will illumine our life and be a lamp for our feet, a light that will lead us down the right path. It is a light that leads to goodness and life, a light that leads to eternal life with God. The guiding light of our lives should be the prize that awaits us: “What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, ... what God has prepared for those who love Him, this God has revealed to us **through the Spirit**. Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of those who love You and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Christ,



Personal Witness

Our faith is more than a Creed that we profess, it is more than a system of beliefs that we adhere to, it is more than a lens or prism through which we look at life, it is a way of life. God gives us rules and guidelines for life. The foundation of which are the Ten Commandments.

At an early age, as part of the Baltimore Catechism that I was forced to memorize from cover to cover, I reduced the Ten Commandments to memory. I could recite them on que. As with much of what I memorized I did not understand half of what I could recite. One day as a 13-year-old, the seventh commandment was put to the test. The facts are as clear today as they were nearly 60 years ago. They are clear because the decision that I was forced to make became a foundational moment in my life. As such I am brought back to that moment often over the years.

I was on the 7th and 8th grade basketball team. I attended a public school that was invited to play in the local Catholic league. We were playing in a Saturday tournament at St. Joseph's School in the heart of our local town. After our morning game we had a break of a couple of hours before our next game. Some of my friends and I walked down the local main street that was lined with stores that had lunch bars and soda fountains, I think they were referred to commonly as five-and-dime stores. One of my friends decided that we should steal a couple of water pistols and use them on the girls back at the gym. My job was to keep the clerk busy while they pulled off the heist. I quickly responded "no" and advised them to drop the idea. I walked out of the store. My friends were caught and were kicked off of the team among other consequences.

As I later reflected on that moment in time, I knew that stealing was wrong. I knew that it was against the 7th commandment. I understood that one. *Thou shalt not steal* seemed straight forward to me. I grew up in a strict Catholic, God fearing, law-abiding family. But I don't recall any of that influencing my decision.

I was very close to my paternal grandfather. I was his first grandson and naturally his favorite. We did everything together. He and grandma owned a small country general merchandise store. He was the most generous person that I have ever known. He was always helping someone in need, especially large families that were in rough times. Grandpa had recently discovered that two teenage boys, from a family that he had once helped, were stealing gas from his store. He caught them and felt that he had to follow through with their parents and with legal proceedings. He felt that it was for their own good. But it was devastating for him!

At the moment of decision in that five-and-dime store that day, all I could think of was how grandpa would feel if he knew that I was involved in stealing. All that mattered at that moment was the fact that I did not want to disappoint my grandpa. I knew that it would break his heart. That thought process trumped my parents, the Ten Commandments, the Church and everything else. Hundreds of times in my life I have reflected on that foundational moment. As a CPA I was often put in a position where someone was asking me to do something that would cross the line of law or ethics, and I refused.

My grandpa has been gone for nearly 50 years. His voice is still in my head, "Right is right and wrong is wrong." I still do not want to disappoint him, and more importantly, Jesus!

