

Luke 6:31-36

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Two few weeks ago, we heard our Lord's words, "whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me". These words, as we know from experience, are sometimes difficult to bear yet are at the same time very powerful. So powerful in fact, that if we keep them we will pass from death to life, from earth to heaven, we become partakers of Divine Life.

In today's Gospel reading we hear some more challenging words. The Lord bids us to love our enemies, do good to all people even if they do evil to us, and to lend to those in need hoping to receive nothing in return. To be sure, these commandments were not easily accepted by those who heard them from the Lord's lips two thousand years ago, just as they are not easily put into practice by us who hear them today.

The Fathers of the Church tell us that there are three laws which God has given to govern the life of men: the natural law, the written law, and the evangelical law.

The natural law is said to be the universal law. It is the innate sense of right and wrong which God has programmed into every single person from their very conception. It is the natural law which forbids us to do to others what we would not like them to do to us. And for this reason the natural law often forms the basis of civil law in that it forbids us to murder, steal, or harm our fellow man. But it is limited in that it does not force man to do good.

The second type of law is the written law or the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law built upon the natural law in that it reinforced that man was not to murder, steal, commit adultery, or bear false witness but it also set the bar a little higher, calling men to forsake idols and love God, never taking His Name in vain and keeping the Sabbath as a day devoted to the Lord.

Yet, the Mosaic Law, did not have the power to perfect men. In fact, as St. Paul tells us in Galatians, God never gave the Law to perfect men, rather He gave the Law to expose their imperfections. The Law was given so that the Hebrew people could understand two things: first, that they could no longer be a law unto themselves for they had received a law higher than human law, a law given by God Himself; and second, that not matter how hard they tried, they could not keep this Law by their own efforts – they needed a Savior, a Messiah, who would fulfill the Law and bring salvation to His chosen people.

And so, with the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, we have the fulfillment of the Old Law and the inauguration of a New Law, the evangelical law, the law of the Gospel, the law of the Good News, or as it is also called the Law of the Spirit.

This new law not only built upon the natural law innate in all men but it also surpassed the written law revealed to God's chosen people through Moses. And as St. Paul tells us, whereas in the Old Testament, the law of Moses was inscribed on stone tablets, in the New Testament, the law of Jesus Christ is inscribed by the Spirit of God on the fleshly tablets of the heart.

Certainly, this imagery reveals that an internalization of the law has taken place. And we see this very clearly in the Sermon on the Mount, where Christ tells us that not only are those who commit murder and adultery liable to punishment but even those who become angry or lust after one another. In other words, not only are those who sin through their actions in need of repentance, but also those who sin in through their thoughts or desires.

And in today's Gospel reading, which is from the same Sermon on the Mount, Christ tells us that not only must we not be angry with anyone, but we must also love our enemies! Not only must we *not do* to others what we *would not like* them to do to us, but we must also *do* to others what we *would like* them to do to us.

According to St. Basil the Great, this commandment, to do to others what we would like them to do to us, is the golden rule. And the commandment, not to do others what we would not like them to do to us, is the silver rule. The one rule is higher than the other, as gold is more precious than silver.

Now of course there is a question here: How is it that Christ has given the golden rule, when people were still struggling to fulfill the silver rule? Why has Christ given the Law of the Gospel when the Hebrew people could not even keep the Law of Moses? Why raise the bar when mankind was falling short to begin with?

Brothers and sisters, the answer to these questions can be found only in the Law Giver Himself, in the One awaited by the prophets, and the righteousness men and women of the Old Testament; that is in the longed for Messiah, Jesus Christ.

When God became man, he united perfectly in Himself the divine and human natures. That is He kept everything which belonged to His divinity and He assumed everything which belonged to our humanity. And by doing so, He immediately, at the very moment of His Incarnation, overcame sin; He overcame the separation of God and men, perfectly deifying our human nature, making it red-hot with the fire of divinity, as an iron glows in the fire.

Yet what was accomplished in the Person of Jesus Christ, through the Incarnation, needed to be extended to all of mankind, for all men were called to overcome sin and be united to God. So after destroying death through the Cross, after defeating the devil through His descent into Hades, and after ascending into heaven Christ sent the longed for and eagerly awaited promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, who would extend the benefits of everything Christ accomplished to all who desired to receive them.

Before His Crucifixion, the Lord told His disciples that He would not leave them comfortless but would send them the Holy Spirit who would take of His, that is His divine nature, and declare it to them. This Christ fulfilled when just ten days after He ascended into heaven, telling the disciples to tarry in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on High, He sent the Holy Spirit down upon them in tongues of fire.

With the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, mankind was once again reunited with God; men, women, and children, of all ages and races were clothed with power from on high, becoming by grace what God is by nature.

Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they received the power to fulfill not only the natural law and the law of Moses, but also law of the Gospel, the law of the Spirit.

Through the Holy Spirit they were given power not only lend to those who were in need, hoping for nothing in return, but also to give away all of their possessions to the poor, living a life of voluntary poverty for the One who through His Incarnation became poor for our sake.

Through the Holy Spirit they were empowered to love their enemies, even those who persecuted them. How many saints prayed to God as they were being put to death those same words which Christ cried to His Father from the Cross, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do!"

And through the Holy Spirit they were given power to deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow Christ, trampling on sin, the devil, and death, as they made their way to the heavenly kingdom.

Brothers and sisters, the bar is set high; the bar is set very high. Yet could it really be any other way? How else could we dwell in God and God dwell in us, if we don't live our lives as He Himself lives His Life?

Jesus Christ has come as our Messiah, fulfilling the Law by giving us His Gospel teaching. He has offered Himself up on the Cross where He shed His most precious blood as the Savior of the world. And He has sent forth into our hearts the Spirit of His Father, so that everything He has might become ours, so that His life might become our life.

We have become as the Apostle Peter tells us, "partakers of the divine nature." Therefore if we wish to retain the Spirit of God, whom we have been graciously given, then must live according to the law which is natural to Him – we must live according to the Law of the Spirit. Let us firmly resolve to make God's way our way, to make His life our life.

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