

February 12, 2017
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Before man are life and death, good and evil. Whichever he chooses shall be given him.
Christianity is only possible if it reflects our inner attitudes.

Harsh Gospel?

Jesus sounds harsh in today's Gospel: *"Whoever is angry will be liable to judgment"; "Whoever looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery in his heart"; "Whoever divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery"; "Do not take a false oath. Let your yes be yes and your no be no."*

Biblical cultural historian, John P. Pilch, tells us that Jesus is actually trying to lighten the burden for the people by reinterpreting the harsh laws of his day. He is offering his followers an honorable way out of situations that could lead to feuds and death:

- (1) *Regarding murder:* Jesus forbids anger and insults that could escalate to murder. For Jesus, squelching feuds was more important than even Temple worship.
- (2) *Regarding adultery:* Back in Jesus' society, adultery was less a result of passion than the attempt by one man to shame another. Death was called for both parties. Avoid adultery and you will avoid possible death.
- (3) *Regarding divorce:* Equally disruptive was divorce. It could tear the villages apart. Jesus is saying forget divorce. Learn to live with your difficulty for the sake of family unity and you won't tear it apart.
- (4) *Regarding lying:* The context here is for a seller not to call on God to witness his false claims for his wares.

In other words, Jesus is reshaping the harsh laws of his day to a more humane form by encouraging his followers not to put themselves into the position of having to face these laws. Jesus is doing the same for us today. He is saying that his way precludes our facing the punishment of the law, that living out our Christianity, in other words, begins with inner attitudes that are Christian, that if we are not loving within ourselves, we will not be loving in the world.

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I experienced this Thursday in my “Colloquy” with my provincial superior. It is a practice in the Society that every Jesuit sees his provincial each year for a personal “Manifestation of Conscience.” It is now more commonly referred to as a “Manifestation of Consciousness.” In other words, it is not an exercise in listing what we’ve done wrong, it is a sharing of all the spiritual and dark movements that we have experienced in our hearts during the past year. It is a means by which we together are more able to discern how the Spirit is working in each Jesuit’s heart, and in the Society as a whole. It is a beautiful experience of grace.

A letter from our provincial to the whole Jesuit province - the Pacific Northwest and Alaska - last June shows the fruit of such a practice. It shows what the Spirit is calling the whole Society to do during our present times. I would like to share some of that letter with you, not only to see what the Spirit wants us Jesuits to stand for, but also what Spirit is calling all of us to stand for.

Dear Brothers and Friends,

As a country, we are reeling from the anger and violence perpetrated in this country. As Christians, we are also disturbed by the divisive rhetoric we hear daily regarding the boundaries that are separating people from each other. We wonder how we can possibly respond. As the Jesuit Order of the Society of Jesus, this is where we stand:

- 1. We will only respond with love*
- 2. We will provide pastoral presence to families and refugees fleeing the violence in their countries in search for peace*
- 3. We stand for love for Muslims*
- 4. We stand for love for our gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender sisters and brothers*
- 5. We stand up for love for Latinos, Native Americans, and all people of color*
- 6. We stand for love for the incarcerated*
- 7. We stand for love pure and simple. What else would Jesus have us do?*

Christianity is only possible if it reflects our inner attitudes

Living our Christianity, in other words, begins with inner attitudes that are Christian, that if we are not loving within ourselves, we will not be loving in the world. That brings us to something I would like to invite you to - to make your own “*Manifestation of Conscience/Consciousness*” to Christ. I’m not talking about your listing what you’ve feel you have done wrong, I am inviting you to look at your own interior attitudes as to where you stand regarding:

1. *Where do you stand towards refugees seeking safety in this country*
2. *Where do you stand towards Muslims*
3. *Where do you stand towards our gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender sisters and brothers*
4. *Where do you stand towards the incarcerated*
5. *Do you stand for love - pure and simple? Let us ask ourselves: "What else would Jesus have us do?"*

Silent Manifestation of Consciousness

*Life and death, good and evil are being placed before us.
Whichever you and I choose shall be given to us.*