

Sixth Sunday OT; Year A; 2023

Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it. In today's Gospel Jesus gives us six teachings: "you have heard it said to you....but I say to you....."

The first was "You have heard it said you shall not kill, but I say to you whoever is angry is liable to judgement." Jesus wanted to make it clear, even before he raised certain Jewish understandings to a higher level, that he was not abolishing the Law but fulfilling it.

Indeed, it would be unthinkable that Jesus would abolish the Law because according to the Babylonian Talmud....the body of Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend....God spent the first three hours of every day sitting studying the Law!

So God knows exactly how we feel spending an hour or so every Sunday....and in the week....at Mass and studying the Bible at home. Not even the smallest letter of the Law would be changed. Indeed, Jesus knew better than to change even one letter of the Law because according to Jewish legends the last time that happened it caused chaos in heaven. God changed Abraham's wife Sarai's name to Sarah (in Genesis) by removing the tiny letter yod (about the size of an English apostrophe) from the end of her name. According to the book "Legends of the Jews" that letter yod created a stink because of being dropped from Sarai's name. It was continually flitting around God's throne in heaven, so God decided to calm the letter yod by putting it at the beginning of Hoshea's name changing Hoshea to Joshua (in the Book of Numbers). So Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, nor to change even one letter of it. Jesus came to fulfil the Law.

That was because the Old Law was incapable of bestowing grace in the same way as the New Law. The Jewish people were never able to keep all the precepts of the Old Law and, as S. Peter taught in the Acts of the Apostles,

“It would only provoke God’s anger now, surely, if you imposed on the disciples the very burden that neither we nor our ancestors were strong enough to support?” Instead, the Old Law always showed up the Jewish people as sinners.

Jesus came to fulfil the Law and this he did in the most unexpected way: Calvary. The Letter to the Hebrews describes Christ’s death as a liturgy, the liturgy of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Formerly the high priest had to enter the Holy of Holies every year sprinkling animal’s blood to make atonement for sin, but Jesus did this once for all on the Cross. Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, not even to change one letter of it, but to fulfil it. We gather around the table of the Eucharist to be present at Calvary and a Jewish scholar, Jacob Neusner, sees Christ’s action overturning the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple as anticipating the table of the Eucharist. He writes:

“For the overturning of the moneychangers’ tables represents an act of rejection of the most important rite of the Israelite cult, the daily whole offering, and, therefore, a statement that there is a means of atonement other than the daily whole-offering.....what was to take the place of the daily whole-offering? It was to be the rite of the Eucharist: table for table, whole offering for whole offering.”

So. Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, not even to change one letter of it, but to fulfil it. Amen.

Blessings....and keep safe.

Fr. Derek