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SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
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When it comes to matters of our Faith...the place we need to start are the Ten Commandments. We hear them summarized at the beginning of every Mass...Love God with all our heart, soul and mind. Love our neighbor as we love ourselves. And everyone is our neighbor!

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us if we want to go to heaven, we have to be more faithful than giving lip service to the Ten Commandments. Faith is a matter of the heart...and our hearts must always be pre-disposed to doing good works. What we think must translate into how we act toward others.

The religious leaders of the day held a literalistic view of the Ten Commandments. With respect to the Sixth Commandment, "Do Not Commit Murder"; they felt they were being faithful to the Law as long as they did not actually go out and intentionally kill someone. They could think whatever bad thoughts about another person they wanted and even act like that person was dead...as long as they didn't cross the line and actually commit murder.

Jesus says that kind of thinking about the Sixth Commandment is seriously flawed. The Sixth Commandment...like all of the Ten Commandments...concerns the disposition of our hearts toward God...and toward others. Hearts predisposed to unjustifiable and uncontrolled anger can lead us into hating others...and hating others is the antithesis of God's Law.

Jesus showed justifiable anger toward those who were dishonoring God and the Temple by charging exorbitant prices to exchange money. What concerns Jesus is our anger not take over our lives and control us: anger for its own sake, hatred, malice and refusal to forgive and reconcile are as much sins in God's eyes as slander and murder.

It is possible to be angry without sinning. But Jesus cautions us against badmouthing others and calling them names...like *raca*...an Aramaic word that roughly translates as *numskull* or *dummy*. Those might not be the worst words we could call someone...but bad

words are the seed of hatred and can lead to bad actions, which we will be held accountable for now, or later.

What about calling someone a *fool*? We tend to use the word *fool* today to describe our opinion about a person's intelligence. In Holy Scripture, calling someone a *fool* has far more serious meaning...and consequences...than calling him a *dummy*. Isaiah wrote what a *fool* says and does insults God. David wrote in Psalm 14 only a *fool* says in his heart there is no God. Jesus warns anyone who calls another person a *fool* is in danger of going to hell. Why?

Foolishness is rebellion against God. In Holy Scripture...a *fool* is one whose words and actions show contempt for God and his Commandments. A *fool*...is an *atheist*. The religious leaders of the time were quick to call those they didn't like *fools*, worthless good-for-nothings, faithless atheists, without knowing the true disposition of their hearts.

Those who claim to be agnostic or atheist deserve our sincere prayers for their conversion and not our condemnation. God knows the true disposition of their hearts just as he knows ours. We must restrain ourselves, when we are frustrated or angry, from calling someone a *fool* without good reason. Jesus tells us we must control ourselves when we are angry and never talk about another person in an unjust, hurtful or slanderous way.

The Ten Commandments are not suggestions for a better life. They are not scorecards to show how good we are or how faithful we are. They tell us where our hearts should be...but often are not. The only conclusion we can reach...we are never good enough or faithful enough to keep them without God's help. That includes the Sixth Commandment; "Do Not Commit Murder"...even in the heart...because our Faith is a matter of the heart.

Jesus tells us to go and make peace with someone who has something against us...while we have time. We are about to confess our sins before God and declare our intent to lead a new life from this moment forward in love and charity with our neighbors. And everyone is our neighbor!

