

VI TRINITY 2020

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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God gave us the Ten Commandments...not the Ten Suggestions...so we could learn to honor him and love him and let him guide our lives. Jesus summarizes the Ten Commandments in the Gospels: First, love God with all our hearts, minds and souls; second, love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Exodus records God giving the Sixth Commandment: "You shall not murder." God values life highly and he wants us to as well. The religious leaders of the day believed they were keeping the Sixth Commandment as long as they didn't actually go out and willfully and with malice take the life of another human being.

Genesis records the first death and it was a homicide. Cain was jealous of his brother Abel. His jealousy turned to outright hatred toward his brother and he murdered him. Although Cain was then afraid for his life, God put a mark on him to warn others not to kill him. He got off lucky.

In the Gospel, Jesus takes the Sixth Commandment to a new and spiritual level...to include murder in thought and word...and not just the physical act of murder. Murder...Jesus tells us...begins with anger.

There is such a thing as justifiable anger. We all get angry with someone for a number of reasons. But if we let our anger get out of control...it can quickly turn into hatred...and hatred is murder in the heart. Unchecked anger and hatred are inconsistent with the Great Commandment to love God and others.

Jesus tells us if we want to go to heaven, we have to be more religious than the religious leaders who claim to know everything. We are being faithful to the Ten Commandments when we do more than give them lip service.

Jesus builds his case by giving us a number of examples of the kind of anger that can lead to hatred and murder in word and deed. Each example he gives is worse than the previous example, with the consequences for each infraction more severe.

If we get angry with someone for no particular reason other than venting...we might find ourselves in trouble with the Law. We need to think twice about what we are about say to someone when we are angry. Words can hurt others...friendships can be damaged. It would be better to take some time out and cool off.

Jesus tells us to never say *Raca* to someone. *Raca* is an Aramaic word meaning "you good-for-nothing" or "empty head"...think "lights on, nobody home". While we might consider this a minor insult today...had we been living in Jesus' time we might have found ourselves in front of the Parish Council...and they would want us to explain ourselves.

What about calling someone a *fool*? Again, we might consider this a minor insult today. But the NT Greek word for fool is *moros* from which we get the word *moron*...not a nice word even today! In the NT, *moros* implies rebellion against God or godless behavior. A *fool* shows contempt for God and his Commandments. A *fool*...is an *atheist*. Calling someone a *fool* suggests they aren't worth God's time and are on the fast track to hell. That is not our call.

The Ten Commandments apply to us today just as much as they did when God gave them to Moses on Mount Sinai. If we hurt someone in thought, word, or deed, Jesus tells us go and reconcile with that person quickly. It's not just the fear of jail time now that should prompt us to do the right thing. It's our desire to try to fix things now...so we don't have to explain to God on Judgment Day why we passed up the opportunity to make things right with our friend or neighbor.

While the Ten Commandments are not God's Ten Suggestions for a Better Life, things do go better for us when we try to keep them. The Ten Commandments tell us what the disposition of our hearts, minds and souls should be...and often are not.

When we find ourselves angry or hateful...the building blocks of murder...we need to replace them with love...even for those we don't like. We can start by recognizing all human beings are important to God...as they should be to us...and we should try to love them as much as he does and as much as he loves us.

