

VI Trinity 2022

Sermon - Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

*Romans 6.3-11 St. Matthew 5.20-26*

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Our friend, Saint Paul, reminds us in the Epistle, through Baptism we are incorporated into the Body of Christ and with Him have won victory over sin and death. We experience new life in our risen Lord.

We are empowered by Paul's words familiar to us in the Easter Canticle:

*"...For we know Christ has been raised from death and will never die again...death will no longer rule over him. In the same way we are to think of ourselves as dead, so far as sin is concerned, but living in fellowship with God through Christ Jesus our Lord. For just as all people die because of their union with Adam, in the same way all will be raised to life because of their union with Christ."*

Father Massey Shepherd, author of the *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary* writes:

*"...what we lost by Adam's sin, we have regained by the triumph of Jesus, the Lord from Heaven. For us this experience of sin's death and our new life in righteousness is dramatically and vividly symbolized in the Baptismal Liturgy by which we are visibly made members of Christ and His Church."*

Through Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension we are made righteous and free to do what is right and pleasing to God. The word righteous comes from the Old English verb *rightwise*...to be made right...correct...or justified. If we look at the text in the Prayer Book the margins are justified...squared up. Jesus justifies us...squares things with God.

Jesus tells his disciples in the Gospel if they want to get to heaven they have to be more righteous...more faithful...than the religion teachers and Pharisees in doing what the Law requires. To make his point...he talks about and gives new meaning to the Sixth Commandment.

The Sixth Commandment states explicitly it is against God's Law to commit murder. In the original Hebrew the word murder included a number of actions, not just the willful and indiscriminate taking of human life. Jesus

expands the definition of murder to include anger against another person without a cause, calling someone bad names and treating them as if they were already dead. Murder in thought and word is as bad as murder in deed.

When we are angry with someone without a good reason or act badly toward someone we are really murdering them in our heart. We are really saying, "You are bothering me and I wish you were dead". Unchecked anger, bad thoughts and bad actions directed at another person are forms of hate, and hate is the opposite of what Christians are called to do...which is LOVE. Hate and love are not compatible with each other. And there is never a time when it is OK for us to hate another person!

The problem with staying angry with someone for a long time is that it takes a lot of effort to keep that anger going. And because the kind of anger Jesus is talking about can only lead to hate, it will work its way into every part of our lives, and soon we will be left with nothing but hate. Hate separates us from God's love and the love of others. Living a life filled with hate is not living a life justified or squared up with God.

We often get angry at others because we see in them the kinds of bad behavior we have in ourselves that we have let get out of control. If we have hurt someone in word or action we need to ask them to forgive us. At the same time, we must be willing to forgive them for the times they have hurt us. Jesus tells us...get rid of those grudges holding us back.

In the Collect we ask God to increase the love in our hearts toward him so we may receive his promises, which will surpass anything we have experienced or understand now. Part of our duty as Christians is to spread that love to others, even if we don't particularly like them. We must love them!

We have been empowered by God's Holy Spirit to do the right thing always, everywhere and at all times. We must take every opportunity to make things right with a friend, neighbor or family member we have been angry with...now...while we have time.

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