

6th Sunday A (Matt 5:20-22, 27-28, 33-37)

Some of us may remember that bumper sticker from the '60s and '70s, "Question Authority." In the popular mind it probably was the rebellious message of some hippies in the Haight Ashbury. Some would maintain that Jesus was basically a rebel, in almost constant conflict with the Jewish authorities concerning the law. They saw him as a rebel who had little or no respect for the ethical and moral traditions of his people. Jesus, on the other hand, saw them as a group of legalists who lived by the letter of the law, and at the same time, constantly violated its ethical and moral purposes.

Today's Gospel is an outgrowth of that conflict. Here in a few well-chosen sentences, Jesus flatly denies the accusations that have been made against him, and then skillfully explains his interpretation of the law and what it should mean in the lives of people. This is as relevant today as it was then.

The first application concerns the killing of another person. The commandment simply states, "You shall not commit murder." Legally speaking, one could live within that law by never taking the life of another human being. Jesus was concerned not just with the letter of the law but its spirit as well. In his eyes all people are important, that every human life is too sacred to be destroyed. But you don't have to use a gun or a knife or a club to destroy a person; subtly senseless anger, abusive language and contempt could destroy people. In the eyes of God all people are important, as walking images of God.

Next, Jesus applied his principle to the law of God concerning sex and marriage. The commandment simply states, "You shall not commit adultery." Legally speaking, a person can live within the limits of that law by never becoming sexually involved with anyone other than his or her spouse. With Jesus, this is not good enough. He was concerned with the spirit of the law. He knew that it had to do with the sacredness of human personality and the sacredness of the home. He also knew that these things can be violated in ways other than actual physical adultery. There is more than one way to diminish the personal worth of another human being. Looking upon another as a sex object or just an object or thing diminishes that person who must be regarded as a walking image of God.

Finally Jesus applied his principle to the area of truth. A smooth talker, manipulator, narcissist, or con artist could manipulate the truth to his or her own advantage. Telling the truth in love to one another is extremely important in how we live our lives as followers of Jesus. The truth is what sets us free, and we follow him who is the way, the truth and the life.

Al Grosskopf, S.j.