Spirituality
Scripture for Life



"Jesus preaches at the sea" (1925) by Hans Lietzmann (Artvee)



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Karl Rahner, one of the greatest Catholic theologians of the 20th century, taught that we become fully human through love of neighbor. To understand this, observe a mother teaching her child to talk: The little one is learning vocabulary and also a way of life, a culture and what it means to be part of a family. At the same time, the mother becomes more of a mother with each loving interaction with her child. As humans, we have the opportunity to grow until we take our last breath, and each relationship enlarges our being.

Sirach, a wise man who wrote around 175 BCE, says something similar. His message today reflects what Moses said more than 1,000 years earlier: "I put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life!" (Deuteronomy 30:19) Sirach uses the images of fire and water to say the same thing. Both want their people to realize that following God's will leads a person to become more profoundly who s/he is and at the same time become more deeply related to all others. Nobody can do it alone. We become who we are together.

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 15, 2026

Sirach 15:15-20
Psalm 119
1 Corinthians 2:6-10
Matthew 5:17-37

When we think about Jesus in his context, we too often denigrate Pharisees and other religious groups of his time as being mired in the law. In truth, they debated the same theme Jesus preached about: how to live as God hopes we will. Jesus told his listeners, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it." Jesus interpreted the deep purpose of the law, demonstrating that the letter was nothing more than an entryway into its richness.

Jesus offered the disciples concrete examples of what it looks like to fulfill the intention of the law. For them as for us, his teaching can sound excessively

demanding. But Jesus wasn't talking about ordinary life in society; he was explaining the ethics of the Reign of God.

For Jesus, murder was more than a question of knives, rope or stones. He considered any dehumanizing action as a mini-murder. For him, anything that undercut the dignity of another person functioned as a form of killing. It's one thing to get angry, even Jesus did that. It's another thing to nurse the kind of anger or wrath that classifies another as an enemy, an obstacle or an impediment. That erases their humanity in our minds. Calling someone *raqa,* or fool, denigrates an image of God, brazenly treating one of God's beloved as less than worthy. Considering others as despicable prepares people for war and accepts capital punishment. What the despisers don't realize is that choosing to view another as inconsequential desecrates them as much as their victim.

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As Jesus elaborated on the theme, he began with his typical hyperbole, suggesting that one should pluck out an unruly eye or cut off a wandering hand. Of course, Jesus knew well that Jewish law prohibited any form of self-harm or mutilation. He wanted to wake them up. Jesus followed his outrageous proposal with something more serious. He reminded people that eyes can be responsible for terrible damage to others. Some perceive others as objects for their satisfaction or tools they can use to their own benefit. Refusing to see or recognize the humanity of a person is a form of assassination.

Jesus continued with other examples that some would find difficult, if not outrageous. Jesus insisted that marriage is a relationship between equals, therefore a man cannot simply be rid of his woman. Couples who nurture mutual love and respect will naturally shun adultery and do everything necessary to avoid the tragedy of divorce. In Jesus' eyes, marriage is a sacrament of divine faithfulness. Loving couples become models for every other relationship of love that humans choose to grow in.

Jesus then talked about the mouth, our primary organ for communication and the one that keeps us alive by ingesting food and drink. Jesus admitted no reason for swearing oaths because genuine relationships build on honesty and integrity. Anything less results in superficial dealings in which people seem like skiers who

never experience anything below the cold, slippery surface of others' personalities.

In sum, Jesus taught that we work out our ethics and participation in the Reign of God through healthy, loving relationships. He showed that deep love of others is necessary for anyone who wants to grow as a human being. Although he didn't know anything about quantum theory, Jesus lived as if everything he said and did had infinite consequences — because it does. Jesus taught his disciples to live like he did because loving and cherishing each person is the only way to happiness and to grow our humanity and thus in union with our Trinitarian God.

Just like the Trinity, we're all in it together.