

Chaplain's Bulletin February 19, 2023



Dear Folks,

The Gospel readings from last Sunday and this Sunday have Jesus issuing some serious challenges. How do we respond in practice? There are some big questions. People might look at His words and say they are not practical, and then they skip over them. That would be very bad. If we can be unaffected by Jesus' words, we are all failing at discipleship.

Jesus talks about anger: "But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment...(Matt 5:22)." Does this mean we should never be angry? We read what Jesus said in Matthew 23, and He sounds pretty angry to me. When Jesus flips over tables and drives the money changers out of the temple, He seems pretty angry then too. What are we to think? We read in Ephesians 4:26-27: "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger, and do not leave room for the devil." There is a right way to be angry, when it is based on love, and we see our loved ones doing self-destructive things. This leads to seeking to help if one can. In Matthew 23, after Jesus is angry, He weeps over Jerusalem. Under loving anger there is profound sadness.

Jesus speaks about divorce, and we see parallels in Matt 19:1-12, Mark 10:1-12 Luke 16:18, and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. Only Matthew has the clarification that it is not applicable to illicit unions, which we find expressed in the Church's practice of declaring certain unions did not achieve a permanent sacramental bond. This happens when something was defective in the way the union was formed. It is controversial and very messy, but the best way we know to find justice and hold to the truth. The key takeaway is approach marriage with all the seriousness that can be mustered. It's doing something that cannot be undone.

We come to the issue of self-defense. In Matt 5:39, Jesus says, "Offer no resistance to one who is evil...". If we take it the way it first sounds, not only do we then renounce war and self-defense, but never call the police, lock our doors, or use password on our computers, for they are all resistance to those who are evil. This can't be right. Letting the world be ruled by predators, terrorists, and bullies does not seem like loving all people. Not only does that mean a lot (awful lot) of innocents get hurt, but the perpetrators are encouraged to lose their souls.

In 1 Samuel 25, Abigail prevents a war between David and her husband Nabal (Abigail is a Biblical heroine worth knowing about). In verses 33-35 David seems happy and relieved that he did not do all that killing. It sounds like he didn't want to but felt compelled to. I think that was common in Biblical times (and is not unknown in our time) when the cycle of revenge did so much harm and neither side really gained. Jesus liberates people from that compulsion.

The Catholic Church has held the right of just war, of enforcing the law, and of sometimes a right, even a duty to defend self or another against an unjust aggressor. Violent defense is always the last resort, and we still have concern for the good of the unjust aggressor. That is why, when even the most horrible villains are caught, we

must still respect their human dignity. Their lives are still sacred. We don't torture them, whatever they have done. This is why the Church has been leaning away from capital punishment since the time of Pope Saint John Paul. It is better they be alive so they can repent (see Ezekiel 18). If I had my way, the worst criminals would be put into a cell and then pipe in EWTN, Word on Fire, and Augustine Institute videos. Victory over evil is greatest when a sinner becomes a saint. That is our goal.

Blessings, Fr. Jim