

**Living a Reflective Life** Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time/A February 16, 2014 8:15 AM  
**Sir 15:15-20; 1 Cor 2:6-10; Mt 5:17-37** (We need to sit back and wonder: Is this desire really a good thing?)

Today's readings are certainly countercultural. They are about values that our society does not hold. For our society the highest value is freedom itself. It's clearly stated by many authors, by many movies, by many novelists, by many editorials: the highest good is freedom itself. But not for Holy Scripture. **For Holy Scripture freedom is simply a potential that could be used for good or for evil.**

Behind these readings is a fundamental affirmation of both Testaments that God has created a wholly good creation. It is wholly good. Evil has seeped into the creation from, not God, but free agents, primarily human beings and the Evil One, mentioned in the last sentence. But because evil has entered it has become part of the very fabric of society, which we cannot get away from, for which reason Jesus talked about the wheat and tares. **You can't get rid of the evil; it's there, but it will be harvested away at the proper time. So what we experience is often an abuse of this great gift of freedom.** But to use freedom properly requires something from God: in the first reading, wisdom. **Wisdom allows us to use freedom in a positive and wholesome way, but it is often absent from even the people that our society calls the leaders.** Whether those are political leaders or intellectual leaders or some other kind of leader, very often they are not possessed of wisdom.

**One of the great problems in our acquiring wisdom is dealing with this whole idea that God permits evil in the world.** That is a hard thing for people to swallow. Many seem to imagine that God if powerful or good enough, could have created a different kind of world where there wouldn't be any evil. But that actually is not possible because such a world would not be free. **If I can only do good and am impeded from doing anything that is not good, then I am really not free.** The real problem with people is really not that they are malicious; some are; most are not. The problem is not that people are depraved; some are; most are not. **But most of us are small.** And that is a problem; **it's a moral problem: pettiness.** We tend not to see the big picture. We tend not to take the long view. What we judge is: What is good for me now in this very instant? And that is not a good question. What is good for me at this very moment doesn't matter. But asking that question and answering it creates dire consequences for all of us, not only for us personally but for those around us, for our society, for our world. **We all affect each other.**

And so this gospel and this reading from St. Paul and the first reading too are all **calling us to a greater reflectiveness.** Now a lot of the women of our parish are right now on retreat—very good. We want people to take time to reflect on life, to become more aware, more contemplative of life and our place in life. This is not a luxury. It is a necessity if we are going to follow the gospel you heard this morning. **It requires asking some tough questions.** Am I pursuing the best path? Are my wants really based on what I need or what my family needs? Do we allow mindless activity to deprive us of spiritual harmony, spiritual tranquility? Our lives cannot always be tranquil, but we have a right to a certain amount of quietude, tranquility in our lives, but we have to take it. And we can't take it when we are going from one activity to another, as if we are not really in charge of our own lives. **Are we overinvolved in affairs that are not**

**servicing our own best interests?** This is a moral question. This is a formation-of-conscience question.

But the biggest moral question is presented by Jesus in the gospel: **Do our desires determine our actions?** Often they do in human behavior. But our desires can come from many places: our own humanity, our own smallness, the Evil One, the world around us, advertising, many places. So should we just accept desire as something that must be fulfilled? That would not be living a moral life. **Doing what we want is not a recipe for happiness. What we want intrudes upon us from many different places. We need to sit back and wonder: Is this desire really a good thing?** There must be some good in it or it wouldn't be desire—that's true. But it could be only good in the short term, in the now moment that we are tempted to live in. On reflection, we might see that what seems so good is really disruptive of the real good for me, for my family, for my society, for my Church, for the world, for this country—maybe. Or, on the other hand, we might find the other: **we might find that what is really disruptive for our lives and upsets everything is really what God wants for us, and needs to be affirmed and accepted like, for example, new life.** Sometimes families are surprised by new life and not always pleased. But life from God is a gift.

**The point is not to act rashly on whims or drives or feelings.** And **Jesus emphasizes that we can go astray in the very making of plans**, not only carrying them out, but in making the plan itself. We can commit adultery in the heart as well as murder. In spite of American constitutional law, sometimes our words are just as bad as actions, from Jesus' point of view anyway. Jesus is also very clear that **pursuing the good is not only avoiding evil, but becoming responsible for building up peace and harmony in our environments**, wherever they are. **Getting along with others, even our opponents, our enemies, is our serious responsibility.** It is not easy, but it is a task God has given us. At times **we need some introspection to help us become better servants of Jesus' mission.**