

Swearing Unnecessary Tenth Week in Ordinary Time Saturday, June 15, 2019 2
Cor 5:14-21; **Mt 5:33-37** (Be an honest person; be known for your integrity.)

“You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, ‘Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow.’”

This section follows the renewal of the idea of Torah in terms of the inner life. So it starts out: “You heard it said that ‘You shall not kill.’ But I say, anyone who is angry with his brother is a murderer. You have heard it said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I say, anyone who looks with lust is guilty of adultery,” and so on. So this is **the movement inward toward a sense of conscience, not the outward play of life, which the Law tended to get focused on.** So **Jesus is interpreting the Law;** he is not rejecting the Law. In fact the whole section is preceded by a statement: **“I have not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it.”** So what does the fulfillment involve? **It involves looking inward to the negative emotions that motivate evil in the world.** So cleansing oneself of anger and lust and greed.

And here we are talking about oaths. Now **people often don’t know what an oath is or swearing means.** People come to Confession; they say, “I was swearing.” I say, “How did you swear?” And they think it means vulgarity or something. No, **swearing means to testify under the protection or observance of some sort of divine witness.** There were different kinds of oaths. The **rabbis then distinguished that some were more valid than others.** “If you swear by the altar, no, that doesn’t really hold, but if you swear by the gold, oh yes, it does,” and so on. So Jesus objected to all that pettifogging, all those distinctions.

The key is let your “Yes” mean “Yes” and your “No” mean “No.” In other words, **be an honest person; be known for your integrity.** The idea that if you swear by the Bible or you swear by this or you swear by that or your mother’s whatever, that that is going to give more weight to

what you say is really preposterous. And yet the very concept is at the root of, first of all, the concept of **law courts**. Go to court to be a witness, they will bring up the Bible, unless you protest. **“Do you swear . . .” Jesus’ point is that shouldn’t be necessary.** Of course behind that is a belief in the court system that lying is fine, unless you lie in court; other than that lying is fine. **Jesus’ point is, no, lying is never fine—never.** “Your ‘Yes’ should mean ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ should mean ‘No,’” and you should be a person of integrity. And people should know that when you say ‘Yes’ you mean ‘Yes,’ and when you say ‘No’ you mean ‘No.’