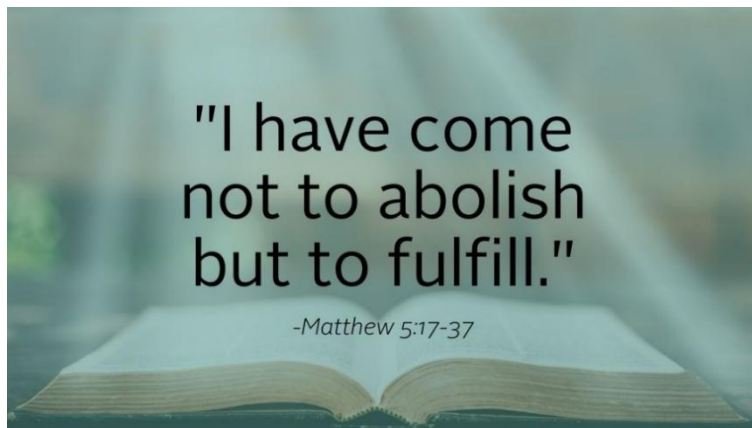


Homily for Sunday, February 15, 2026

One day a very successful lawyer headed out the door for work. In his path was his three-year-old son playing with blocks. The man patted the boy on the head, stepped over him, open the door, and went outside to get to his car. Halfway down the walk a guilt bomb exploded within him. "What am I doing?" he thought to



himself. "I'm ignoring my son. I never play with him. He'll be old before I know it." In the background of his thoughts he heard the pounding rhythm of Harry Chapin's song "Cat's in the Cradle." (You might

remember this ballad of lost fatherhood where, in the song, the son asks, "When are you coming home, Dad?" The father answers, "Don't know when, but we'll get together then, son"). With this song ringing in his ears, the father returned to the house and sat down with his son and began to build blocks. After two minutes, the boy looked up at his father and said, "Daddy, why are you mad at me?"

In Jesus' world, as it should be in our world, words are not that important (although we can hurt each other with words). What's more important are actions. As the expression goes, "actions speak louder than words." True enough. But, in Jesus world, there's something even more important than actions. Jesus wants to know from what space our actions flow. What is the origin of our actions? It's very dangerous to be in a room all by yourself and think you can hide

your thoughts from Jesus. You can't; neither can I. He knows what's in the minds and hearts of people. He's not a spy or an eavesdropper just waiting to catch and punish you for having impure or improper thoughts. He simply wants to warn you, as he does in today's gospel, to be attentive to where your thoughts and actions originate from.

The same action can originate from two different places within me: one good and one bad. I can give a person living on the street \$5 just to appease my conscience and get rid of the guy. Inwardly I can say, "There, I did my part. You should be grateful for my generosity. Now I don't have to think about you or your situation anymore." That's one place my actions can come from, and it often does. But I can give that same \$5 to the same person out of genuine care for them knowing that he is my brother, my sister in Christ who has the same dignity and importance before God as I do. So you see, the same action of giving \$5 can come from two different places within me.

When the three-year-old saw his father stoop down and play blocks with him, he had already figured out where this gesture was coming from. It was coming from a place of guilt not love. He sensed that he was holding his father up from where his father really wanted to be...at work making more money. Not only can Jesus read peoples' hearts, but, apparently three-year-olds can as well.

Six times Jesus says, in that gospel reading, "You have heard it said..." but "I say to you..." You have heard it said that you shall not murder (which is really good advice), but I say to you don't even get angry with a brother or sister. The

teachings of Jesus focus on the origin and growth of thought, what the ancient rabbis called “evil imaginings.” Murderous acts will only be stopped when the violent seeds in the heart are either rooted out or not allowed to grow. It’s our starting point, much more than the end result, that concerns Jesus.

You have heard it said, “You shall not commit adultery,” but I say to you, “Don’t even look at another person with lust in your heart.” Again, it beckons the question, “where does adultery start?” There is a classic story in the Bible about Jerusalem’s greatest king, King David. One day from the roof of the king’s house, David is walking around and sees, from this high vantage point, a woman bathing in the distance. David has his messengers send for her and he lays with her. This is not a love story. David’s lust unfolds into rape. The story gets even worse as David sends this woman’s husband to the front line of a battle where he surely will be killed. And that’s exactly what happened. But it all began with a lustful eye on the palace roof.

Jesus believes in nipping problems in the bud to use an expression of ours. When a leaf or flower begins to form, just like a little bud, and if you nip it—cut it, then it won’t grow. You nipped it in the bud. If you don’t, like a little, innocent, white lie, that is allowed to grow, it can snowball into a much more harmful lie in no time. Amputate the bud before it can grow. Jesus says it in a harsher way when he speaks about amputating your hand that causes you to sin. The amputation is never something in the outside, so don’t worry. It’s always something small and deep that lies in the recesses of our minds.

This gospel passage is part of three chapters in Matthew's Gospel that we traditionally call the "Sermon on the Mount." It's Jesus' inaugural speech. He wanted to say this stuff on Day 1, so that we could get on a good trajectory in life. The Sermon on the Mount began with Jesus telling us eight times that we are blessed (Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, those who mourn, the peacemakers, etc.) And then he told us last weekend, in that same sermon, that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We are blessedness, salt, and light. Jesus wants us to identify with our peak, with our highest identity, with who we most truly are. When we do so, we move forward in life in a much healthier trajectory. When your starting point is that you are blessedness, salt, and light you have a much better chance at loving yourself, your neighbour, and the earth you walk upon than when you start off with the idea that you are a sinner and only capable of sin.

"Get the beginning right," Jesus seems to be saying, "and the rest will fall in place." Jesus is banking on the truth that if you know you are a good tree you will bear good fruit. Here's a little story from Fr. Ron Rolheiser about someone who got the beginning right.

Powers Hapgood, an American who lived during the early and mid-twentieth century, was Harvard educated and inherited a factory. But he gave the factory to the workers and was later, just after World War II, arrested for protesting for the poor. In court, the judge asked him: "Mr. Hapgood, you are Harvard educated, why would anyone of your advantages choose to live as you do?" Hapgood

replied: "Because of the Sermon on the Mount, sir." (Quoted by Ron Rolheiser in Sacred Fire, p. 96)

~Fr. Phil