

Sixth Sunday *per annum*

Year A, 2026

Sir 15:15-20 1 Cor 2:6-10

Ps 119 Mt 5:17-25

In praise of God's commandments

Let's talk about the psalms.

Question. How many psalms are there? Answer. 150.

Question. Which is the best known psalm? Answer. Psalm 23: *"The Lord is my shepherd"*

Question. Which is the most recited psalm, liturgically speaking? Answer. Psalm 95, which is said each day by those who are obliged to recite the Divine Office, also known as the Liturgy of the Hours. It is the invitatory psalm, which opens the liturgical day: *"Come, let us sing to the Lord and shout with joy to the Rock who saves us. Let us approach him with praise and thanksgiving and sing joyful songs to the Lord."*

Question. Which is Fr Guillory's "favorite" psalm? I mentioned this to you before some years ago. Answer. Psalm 27, or at least one line in it in particular: *"One thing I ask of the Lord, this I seek: to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life."*

Question. Which is the shortest psalm. Answer. Psalm 117. It's all of two verses long. Wanna hear it? *"O praise the Lord, all you nations, acclaim him, all you peoples. Strong is his love for us; he is faithful forever."*

Question. Which is the longest psalm? Answer. Psalm 119. It's all of 176 verses long. Wanna hear it? Just joking! Psalm 119 is divided

into 22 sections each 8 verses long. The 22 stanzas are for each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and each stanza contains 8 verses starting with that letter. It is a type of acrostic poem.

All the psalms are in fact poems. The Book of Psalms is a book of collected poems, some attributed to King David or to other lesser-known biblical figures. The psalms are poems that were recited as prayers or sung during worship.

Psalm 119 is all about the law of God, each verse resounding the praise of God's law, his way, his decrees, his commands and precepts and statutes, his judgments and testimonies, his word and commandments, his paths and his promise. To know God's law is wisdom. To keep God's law is life. To love God's law brings peace and prosperity. This is what the psalmist writes about in the great poetic and literary triumph that is Psalm 119.

Today, we are given a few verses of Psalm 119 as our responsorial psalm, which serves as an answer, a response, to our first reading from Sirach, which is then reflected and fulfilled in the gospel, where Jesus speaks and teaches about the fulfillment of the law.

The selected verses from Psalm 119 include the first verses of that long psalm, verses that promise blessing for those "*who walk in the law of the Lord*" and "*who seek [God] with all their heart,*" which is done by observing his decrees. Immediately, then, Psalm 119, in its opening verses, links the keeping of God's law with blessing.

The psalmist then prays to God, asking that he may always be steadfast in keeping God's statutes, that his eyes may look upon the

wonders of God's law, seeing in God's ordinances not just an obligation of duty, but wisdom, beauty, and wonder. The psalmist prays that he may be faithful to the law not by mere external observance alone, but that God would instruct him, so that through understanding and discernment, he may keep the law with all his heart. Not just external observance, but internal freedom. Not out of mere duty, but from sincere and genuine love.

This was and always will be the challenge: to receive the commandments of God as expressions of his loving care for us. Too often, because we are hard-headed and hard of heart, we interpret the divine law as burden, sometimes even as a mean-spirited or a hateful imposition on our freedom. And so we reject it or we rebel against it ... or, what is worst of all, indifferent, we just ignore it. And we do this to our detriment. This is not wisdom; it is folly. A folly that St Paul in our second reading calls "*a wisdom of this age,*" which is an age of rebellion, rejection, darkness, and sin: an age of arrogant folly.

In an extravagance of love, God created all the world and us in that world. God's wisdom is therefore immense, as Sirach says in our first reading. God is "*mighty in power and all-seeing,*" and "*he understands man's every need,*" which is why in his goodness and lovingkindness, God has revealed to us his way, his truth, his life ... which are found in what he commands.

What God bids us do and what God forbids us from doing is not meant to limit our freedom, but to increase it. God's law does not

hold us back; it lifts us up. God's commandments do not constrain us; they release us.

An illustration. Any dupe can make sounds on a piano keyboard. And that dupe may actually try to convince himself that he is expressing himself musically. But in reality, he has no skill, no training, understands nothing of music theory or of piano technique. The keyboard has within it a law, and until one submits to that law, learns its rules, submits to its discipline, one has only the most limited and rudimentary freedom with respect to the keyboard.

Put me on a keyboard, I can make sounds by pushing the keys, but not music. Music is something more than mere sounds. Put a trained musician on a keyboard, and she makes music, something beautiful for all to appreciate. Who has more freedom before the keyboard, me or the one who has for long years subjected herself to the law of music?

Who has more freedom as a human being, one who lives according to the commandments of God or one who lives according to his own caprice? The law of God makes for unity and blessing and peace. The caprice of man makes for resentment and strife and striving.

Jesus's teachings on the commandments, which are given in today's gospel passage, show the wisdom of God's law. Notably, Jesus does not mitigate the commandments one iota; he expands on them. And doing so, he reveals the commandments' true wisdom. Keeping the commandments is not just a matter of external observations, doing the least possible, but about a conversion of heart, *metanoia*, which

we have learned means a new way of being in the world, and relating to the world, and acting in the world. The commandments of God are wisdom, and they reveal a truth that sets free those who keep them, when they keep them with all their mind, heart, soul, and strength (Mk 12:30).

You shall not kill. Jesus reveals the deeper wisdom of that commandment, which goes so far as to forbid abusive language, exclude contempt of others, demand reconciliation.

You shall not commit adultery. Jesus teaches that the deep wisdom of this commandment excludes the lecherous look, the lewd act, the libidinous desire. It forbids divorce. It demands continence, commitment, constancy, chastity.

You shall not take a false oath. The Lord instructs that the deep wisdom of this commandment forbids all dishonesty of whatever kind. More profoundly, it demands forthrightness in speech, uprightness in intent. It calls for guilelessness, simplicity of mind, heart, and speech. Yes means yes. No means no. Without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion. It demands of us to be true-minded, true-hearted, true-spoken.

What we are meant to learn by Jesus's teaching is that the wisdom of the commandments is drawn from the wholeness, the oneness, the unity of God and that our observance of them will bring about the wholeness, the oneness, the unity of God's people. The commandments are about integrity, being whole, and wholesome, and holy.

Which is why Jesus ends this teaching by saying that *“anything more is from the evil one.”* As Sirach said in our first reading: *“[God] has set before you fire and water ... life and death, good and evil.”* Whichever we choose will be given us. Let us choose good. Let us choose life. Let us choose wisdom. And in wisdom, let us choose to keep the commandments of God, for they will save us, and we shall live. Amen.