

6TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—Year A—February 12, 2017

01. **“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of the heaven.”** With these words, Jesus once again sharply condemns the scribes and Pharisees—and warns us not to imitate their example. Because, even though they were the religious leaders of the time—the scribes and Pharisees were **not at all concerned with the interior disposition of a person — and with a person’s interior life.** Instead, they were focused **entirely on many external, superficial, and ritualistic acts of piety** — acts they believed would justify them in the sight of God, and assure them a place in God’s Kingdom.
02. This focus on external, ritualistic acts of piety was a widespread phenomenon in the time of Jesus — because not only did the scribes and Pharisees believe and promote this — so did many others at the time. And so, the interior disposition of a person (**one’s interior life**) was largely ignored when it came to meeting the demands of the Law — because the Law was all about **external acts—not interior disposition.**
03. But with the coming of Jesus the Messiah—Our Lord **contradicts this widespread belief** — spreading the news that external, ritualistic acts were **insufficient to make one righteous in God’s sight** — revealing to us that external acts of piety are only **part of the picture** — that external acts alone **cannot guarantee us a place in God’s Kingdom.**
04. Because Jesus did not come **to abolish the Law—but to fulfill the Law,** and to make the Law complete — by complementing the Law with His message of salvation, and the experience of God’s Presence living among us and within us. Because the Law **alone, cannot justify us before God;** as the scribes and Pharisees believed.
05. And so, Jesus was telling them, just as He is NOW telling us—not to focus on **external, ritualistic practices** — not to make external acts of piety **the be-all, and end-all, of our spiritual lives** — but to make our interior disposition, our interior lives, the primary focus of our spiritual health.
06. In other words, Jesus is telling us **to focus on what is going on in our hearts** — because the heart is **the most important battle ground** for where the battle between good and evil takes place. And because the heart is the very centre of the human person—our spiritual and emotional core — where the war between good and evil rages on.

07. Anyone involved in fitness training will tell you how important one's core is, to one's overall physical health — and that optimum fitness begins, and depends, on the condition of one's core. Because our physical core affects how well **our entire body functions**. And if we ignore the condition of our core — then no amount of exercise will get us into **prime physical shape**.
08. It is the very same with the human heart—**the emotional and spiritual core of our being**. If our hearts are not in good shape — if our hearts are poisoned — if our hearts are filled with **bitterness, judgment, lust, greed, and the cares of this world** — then our entire **spiritual and emotional** health is in danger.
09. And no amount of external acts of piety can remedy this. For as good as it is to go to Mass regularly, to pray the Rosary, and to practice other forms of devotion and piety — **these external acts alone** are insufficient to make us **spiritually and emotionally healthy** — and to justify us in the sight of God.
10. Because, again, the human heart is **THE main battle ground** where the war between good and evil is fought — and because the war between good and evil that we see in the world **is merely a reflection** of the war between good and evil that takes place in the human heart.
11. I heard something on the news recently that really drove this home. They were the words of an Imam—who spoke at one of the funerals for **THREE of the men** that were killed at the mosque near Quebec City two Sundays ago. I found his words to be profound and insightful.
12. Referring to the young man who committed the heinous and senseless act of violence, the Imam said: “Before becoming a killer, the young man was himself a victim. Because before planting the bullets in the bodies of **HIS victims**—someone planted ideas **in his head**—**FAR more dangerous** than the bullets in his hands.
13. These words from the Imam, and today's Gospel, are a reminder that sometimes we can get caught up and focused on the evil taking place **outside of us, around us, and in the world**. But the Lord is telling us to focus on the evil that might be taking place **in our OWN hearts** — because the human heart is the source of the evil we see in the world today. And so, we really need to guard our hearts—and be vigilant about what kind of ideas and sentiments we allow to enter them.
14. Because often it starts as an idea in our head, which may seem harmless at first — but when it takes root in our hearts, it grows into a cancerous virus

that infects our entire soul—and jeopardizes our spiritual health. It can even start as something good at first, like a **desire for justice**—but then is twisted into a **lust for revenge** — or a love for one’s country, that turns into a **hatred for immigrants** — or an aspiration for financial health and security, that is twisted into greed and an obsession with money.

15. And, in today’s Gospel, Our Lord is also warning us that it doesn’t take long (or much)—for these ideas, these sentiments to grow into something far more insidious. Because resentment is merely a heartbeat away from murder — despair merely a heartbeat away from suicide — judgment merely a heartbeat away from religious and racial intolerance.
16. And so, the message for us today, is NOT to focus so much **on the evil without, but to really look at the evil within**. Because **it is the evil within that eventually leads to the evil without**—the evil we see in the world around us. And because religious practices, and external acts of piety, cannot **(by themselves)** erase the evil in our hearts.
17. Don’t get me wrong—acts of piety and devotion are **essential to one’s spiritual health**. But Our Lord is telling us that they are only **half the battle** — that without the focus on our interior disposition—without the focus on the state of our hearts — these acts of piety cannot benefit us — and cannot justify us before God.
18. And so, external acts of piety are pointless—if we are completely ignoring the state of our hearts. For if **our hearts are poisoned, then all our actions are tainted** — because **the authenticity and dignity of our actions ultimately flow from what is in our hearts**.
19. For there are those who go to Mass and pray the Rosary — those who practice external acts of piety and devotion repeatedly — but whose hearts are full of bitterness and judgment.
20. Because it is only by drawing closer to God — by entering into an intimate relationship and friendship **with Him** — by allowing Him to enter and live **within our hearts** — by allowing Him to **completely possess our hearts**, that will prevent **our hearts from being possessed by evil**. Because the focus, the be-all and end-all of our Faith, is not external acts of piety — but **a vibrant, dynamic, intimate friendship** with the living God.
21. One of the best ways to safeguard our hearts — and to rid them of the evil within—is to bring whatever is going on inside of us out into the light—by sharing whatever is **in our hearts** with someone we trust.

22. Or better yet, by exposing what is in our hearts to the light of the Sacrament of Confession. Because some of the best confessions, and one of the best ways to reap the full benefit of the Sacrament—is to expose all the darkness, all the evil that may be in our hearts (even if they have not yet resulted in actions) — and by sharing with a confessor the war between good and evil going on inside of us — the war between forgiveness and resentment—between jealousy and gratitude—between compassion and cruelty.
23. Because hiding the evil thoughts and sentiments within us—or trying to suppress them or deny them by not allowing them to surface—only serves to strengthen their hold on us—and allow them to grow and thrive.
24. And so, on this the 6TH Sunday of Ordinary Time, Our Lord speaks these words in today's Gospel, not to condemn us, but to warn us — to help us understand that it is not so much **the evil without that we need to be concerned about, but the evil within.**
25. Because, again, the war between good and evil is being fought **primarily in the human heart** — and the evil we see in the world, is merely a reflection of the evil that lives in the human heart. And Jesus came to complete the Law, and to abolish the evil within us, by living **within our hearts**—and by **possessing our hearts completely.** Because it is only when Jesus Himself fills our hearts—it is only when He possesses our hearts completely — **that** the victory over evil is accomplished **within us, and within the world.**