

Homily based on the readings from February 15, 2026 (Sirach 15.15-20; 1 Corinthians 2.6-10; Matthew 5.17-37)

Unless you have been living in complete seclusion for the past several weeks, you have almost certainly experienced the avalanche of marketing associated with Saint Valentine's Day – warmly encouraging us to purchase cards, candy, and flowers, while at the same time inviting us to watch a multitude of earnest yet endearing television movies. For the most part, Valentine's Day is a perfectly innocuous celebration – one which, of course, was originally connected with the Catholic liturgical calendar. Despite the obvious commercialization, there is never anything wrong with engaging in small acts of kindness, directed toward the people we love.

The only *danger* comes when we view these acts as being more meaningful than they really are. Buying flowers is a lovely gesture, but it is never enough to sustain a marriage. On a broader level, while our

actions are certainly important, our relationships are primarily affected by who we *are*, rather than by what we *do*.

Christ himself makes exactly this point in today's Gospel. As we all know, every married person has a fundamental duty to be faithful to his or her spouse. To quote the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council:

As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose *total fidelity* on the spouses and argue for an *unbreakable oneness* between them. (*GS* 48)

This obligation, though, is not just a matter of external actions. As Jesus reminds us, “total fidelity” requires a complete reorientation of the heart: “everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” As husbands and wives, it is not sufficient to refrain from *acting* on our sinful impulses – we have to become the kind of people who would never even *contemplate* such behavior in the first place.

When we speak about love, particularly in the middle of February, it is easy to focus on our human connections – especially our current or potentially future spouse. Nevertheless, there is a basic and essential fact that all of us need to acknowledge. Regardless of how blessed and fruitful our marriage turns out to be, the greatest love of our life will *never* be our husband or our wife. Our one true love, the focus of our very *being*, is and must always be *Jesus Christ*. This principle, which applies equally to all Christians – young or old, male or female, single or married – is the entire *purpose* of our existence. Remember the formula from the old Baltimore Catechism: *Why did God make you?* “God made me to know him, to love him, and to serve him in this world, and to be happy with him forever in heaven.” All of our other loves – no matter how *precious* they are to us – *must* be subordinate to this one all-encompassing, all-consuming passion.

As you probably know, the first five books of the Old Testament contain a variety of rules and regulations, which are designed to serve as a roadmap for our relationship with God. Although we are most familiar

with the Ten Commandments, there are actually a total of 613 separate ordinances. Jesus, in his earthly ministry, is not seeking to undo or overrule any of them. As we just heard him say: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” He is not rejecting the law itself, but the destructive habit of fixating on our *actions* rather than transforming our *hearts*. It is useless, for example, to refrain from physical violence if we are still allowing ourselves to be consumed by anger:

You have heard that it was said to your ancestors,

*You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.*

But I say to you,

whoever is angry with his brother

will be liable to judgment.

The point, of course, is that Jesus not only wants us to *behave* better, but to *be* better.

There is no question that what God is demanding from us is incredibly difficult. It would be much simpler if we could just follow a checklist, but that is not the way love works. This is not a situation where we can cut corners or take shortcuts. Every day of our lives, we are presented with a fundamental decision: life or death, good or evil, love or apathy. What we choose is a reflection of who we are. The good news is that the Lord will never stop reaching out to any of us. His unquenchable love is the *heart* of the universe, the *origin* and the *object* of all creation. As his beloved children, we are not expected to understand every aspect of that love, but we must ardently embrace it with the *fullness* our being:

*[w]hat eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart – what God has prepared for those who love him.*