

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Year A January 16, 2014

Theme: Our Jewish Family

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In the year 388, an Italian Catholic bishop led a mob in the desecration, burning and destruction of his city's Jewish synagogue and all its sacred objects.

The Roman emperor ordered that Bishop and his people to rebuild and restore the synagogue.

None other than the venerable Archbishop of Milan, Saint Ambrose fiercely opposed the emperor's orders and declared that he himself was ready to burn synagogues for a synagogue was nothing but "*a haunt of infidels, a home of the impious, a hiding place of madmen, under the damnation of God himself.*" (James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, Houghton Mifflin, 2001, page 207.)

To order the rebuilding of such a place, railed the saintly Bishop Ambrose, "*once it had been burned, was an act of treason to the Faith.*"

Our Christian history is replete with horrendous injustices toward the Jewish people:

The confiscation and burning of sacred scrolls.

Involuntary subjection to long harangues and sermons on the evils of Judaism.

Forced conversions and baptisms, even the abduction of Jewish children to be raised in Christian homes.

Mob incineration of synagogues and Jewish homes, businesses and neighborhoods.

Wholesale expulsion of entire Jewish national populations from the countries where they had lived for centuries.

Conviction of a whole race and successive generations as Christ-killers though it was the Roman authorities who convicted Jesus with the collaboration of a handful of Jewish leaders.

All of this laying the foundation to the horrors of the Nazi holocaust.

Such a terrible history when, in the Gospel of Matthew, from the mouth of Jesus himself we heard the words:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”

And:

“[N]ot the smallest letter of the law will pass away.... until all things have taken place.”

Matthew, in fact, seems at pains to portray Jesus as fully consistent and in harmony with the ancient Jewish law.

Jesus does not offer a moral code different from that given by the Law of Moses nor does he criticize that code.

Rather he seems to draw out the deepest implications of that code.

The Law of Moses says: “You shall not kill” – number 5 in the Jewish list of 10.

Digging deeply, Jesus contended the real issue is anger.

We may not call one another “Raqa” any more, but I don’t think I need to lay out all the names we do use, do I?

Isn’t this anger toward one another at the root of murder and getting at this anger what we should really be about?

Furthermore, said Jesus, before we get all warm and fuzzy about worshipping the God we cannot see, shouldn't we leave our gift at the altar and get right with the brother or sister we can see?

And what about that old Jewish commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." – Which was that, number 6!

Jesus certainly did not get rid of this long-standing Jewish commandment: **"everyone who looks at someone with lust has already committed adultery in their heart."**

Now there's one for every guy who glanced at the SI Swimsuit issue or all the women who ogled the Olympic men in their speed-skating uniforms this week!

The eyes are the first step toward that adultery, then the hands: better to cut them off and throw them away than to have your whole body enter into Ghenna, he said.

Jesus did not call for a replacement of Judaism nor the Law of Moses but for a "righteousness" beyond what he saw in the scribes and the Pharisees of his time:

- beyond a show-off for everyone to see religiosity;
- beyond a bare-minimum morality;
- beyond a relationship with God that was founded on mere duty.

Jesus was himself born and raised a Jew and the ancient Law was God's gift to the Jewish people.

For him the faith of the Jews formed the basis of his faith.

For him the Law of Moses was the moral code on which life and community were built.

For him the relationship with God developed and treasured over the centuries by the Jewish people was the same that led him to his own intense and intimate relationship with God.

How and why the deadly animosity of Christ's later followers toward the Jews ever developed is surely one of the bleakest communal sins of the church.

Especially when you think the Eucharist we are about to celebrate is itself based on a Jewish ritual meal.

How can we ever think of the Jewish people as anything except our brothers and sisters in faith.