Reflection By: Deacon Paul Hursh

This week’s portion of the Sermon on the Mount consists of a series for sayings which begin with, “You have heard that it was said, …” “But I say to you, …” In each case Jesus states the Law of Moses on a particular point and then he restates the law in a deeper way. At the outset he explains that his intent is not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. Specifically he is moving the focus from the wrongful behavior that constitutes sin, to the attitudes and judgments in the heart that precedes our wrongful action. Jesus understands that the root of evil is what we harbor in our minds, and it is what we think about others that often lead to the broken relationship we call sin.
When we sin, two or more relationships are violated. We alienate the person or group we have injured by our wrongful action, and we alienate ourselves from God. Broken relationships are not healed by exacting punishment, but through reconciliation with the injured parties, and to seek forgiveness from God. I readily admit that asking God for forgiveness through the Sacrament of Reconciliation is easier and less messy than redressing wrongs with other human beings. But let’s look at the way of avoiding this dilemma in the first place…

First of all, I should point that Jesus is not minimizing the importance of the prohibitions against murder, or adultery, or divorce. Rather, Jesus is stressing the importance of recognizing the attitudes and the judgments we hold in our hearts that leads to these violations and that result in broken relationships and alienation from God. These judgmental attitudes arise in our minds; therefore the healing of these deformations will not be resolved within the same mind conciseness that formed them. They can only be healed within the heart, a centering place of passionate love. So how does that happen?

I’m a picture kind of guy so for our discussion lets consider the images here of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the immaculate heart of Mary. Note that Jesus and our Mother are not pointing to their heads, but to their hearts. With in the merciful heart of Jesus and of the compassionate heart of Mary we can find a place where we can first experience our own healing and forgiveness, so that we can then express the same healing and forgiveness to those persons from whom we are estranged.

Imagine that person whom we may think of as our enemy, or accuser, or competitor. This image rests in our mind and our understanding of this person is by way of our own calculations of their worth or maybe their worthlessness. Now move that image down into our heart where that image can experience a transformation through the warmth of our beating heart and flowing blood. Held them in this space we will find it harder to be judgmental and accusatory about this person. Now we are in a stance where we can pray for them with a sincere heart. The reason for this transformation is that our heart is the dwelling place of Jesus and it is the same place where we can experience the unconditional love extended to us by God. This doesn't mean that their behavior will change, but it does mean that we can stop being their judge and the exacter of punishment. In stead we can become an understanding and forgiving brother and sister. When we can take this stance there is no limit to what miracles God can work in and through us.

I understand that you may be skeptical about all this – I am also a skeptic, but I was amazed with the outcome of this exercise. Remember what Jesus told his disciples, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father.” (Matthew 5: 43-45a)

But now I am getting ahead of myself, because this saying is the heart of next Sunday’s Gospel. More next week.