

Walking in the *Foot Prints* of Jesus

A Discipleship Journey



Sermon on the Mount

Week 13

Words Matter

Matthew 5:33 - 37

Opening Prayer:

Falling In Love

Prayer of Pedro Arupe, S.J.

Nothing is more practical than finding God,
That is, falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.
What you are in love with,
What seizes your imagination,
Will affect everything.

It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,
What you will do with your evenings,
How you will spend your weekends, what you read,
Who you know, what breaks your heart,
And what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

Reflection

"Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all, either by heaven for it is the throne of God, or by the earth for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one." Matthew 5:33 - 37

The law against oaths became part of the Old Testament law because the Israelites had a tendency to lie. Chaos emerged because a person's words could not be trusted. The law against lying and the enforcement of oaths that emerged combines several Old Testament

precepts which required people who made vows to keep them. The Pharisees, in their interpretation, developed elaborate rules around these restrictions and enforced only those oaths which included the divine name. Oaths made by any other formula (e.g., I swear on my ancestor's grave!) weren't as binding so they weren't strictly enforced. Jesus says that, regardless of what we swear by, our word is binding so we should avoid the problem altogether and not swear (i.e., vow) to a truth or take an oath.

In reflecting on how this applies to us today, it might be helpful to consider what compels us to take an oath in the first place. Generally, the only reason we might swear to a truth or take an oath is when our simple word is not likely to be trusted. We might say, "I swear this is true.", or "I swear to you it happened that way!" as a way of assuring others that what we speak of is true. Or we may exaggerate or allow people to exaggerate for us to embellish a story; this only becomes another form of a lie. And then there are what we call the "white lies" we tell to avoid confrontation. These, too, however innocent and well-intentioned, are, at their core, still a lie.

Words matter. What we say and how we say it matters. Jesus wants us to keep our promises and be people of our word; He wants our speech to match the thoughts of our heart. In honest communication, the kind that sustains community life, a simple yes and no is all that is needed. Vows and oaths become unnecessary when the integrity of our speech remains pure.

Reflection Questions: What is the connection between my heart and the words that I speak? What would help me pause before speaking to make sure that they are aligned? In what way can my words bring about the truth of Jesus?

Closing Prayer

Speak to Jesus about what is on your heart, then rest in silence for a few moments listening for His response.