ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Be my protector, O God, a mighty stronghold to save me. For you are my rock, my stronghold! Lead me, guide me, for the sake of your name.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us;

you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer;

you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

COLLECT

O God, who teach us that you abide in hearts that are just and true, grant that we may be so fashioned by your grace

as to become a dwelling pleasing to you.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever.

FIRST READING

Ecc 15:15-20

A reading from the book of Ecclesiasticus.

If you wish, you can keep the commandments, to behave faithfully is within your power.

He has set fire and water before you; put out your hand to whichever you prefer.

Man has life and death before him; whichever a man likes better will be given him.

For vast is the wisdom of the Lord; he is almighty and all-seeing. His eyes are on those who fear him, he notes every action of man. He never commanded anyone to be godless, he has given no one permission to sin.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**.

PSALM Ps 118

Response:

They are happy who follow God's law!

- 1. They are happy whose life is blameless, who follow God's law!

 They are happy those who do his will, seeking him with all their hearts. (R.)
- 2 You have laid down your precepts to be obeyed with care. May my footsteps be firm to obey your statutes. (R.)
- 3 Bless your servant and I shall live and obey your word.
 Open my eyes that I may consider the wonders of your law. (R.)

Teach me the demands of your statutes and I will keep them to the end. Train me to observe your law, to keep it with my heart. (R.)

SECOND READING 1 Cor 2:6-10

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians.

We have a wisdom to offer those who have reached maturity: not a philosophy of our age, it is true, still less of the masters of our age, which are coming to their end. The hidden wisdom of God which we teach in our mysteries is the wisdom that God predestined to be for our glory before the ages began. It is a wisdom that none of the masters of this age have ever known, or they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory; we teach what scripture calls: the things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him.

These are the very things that God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit reaches the depths of everything, even the depths of God.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, Alleluia! Speak, Lord, your servant is listening: you have the message of eternal life. Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Mt 5:17-37

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

(For shorter form, read between > and <)

> Jesus said to his disciples: < "Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish them but to complete them. I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law until its purpose is achieved. Therefore, the man who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven; but the man who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven.

> "(For) I tell you, if your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.

"You have learnt how it was said to our ancestors: You must not kill; and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you: anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it before the court; < if a man calls his brother 'Fool' he will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and if a man calls him 'Renegade' he will answer for it in hell fire. So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering. Come to terms with your opponent in good time while you are still on the way to the court with him, or he may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. I tell you solemnly, you will not

get out till you have paid the last penny.

> "You have learnt how it was said: You must not commit adultery. But I say this to you: if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart.< If your right eye should cause you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; for it will do you less harm to lose one part of you than to have your whole body thrown into hell. And if your right hand should cause you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; for it will do you less harm to lose one part of you than to have your whole body go to hell.

"It has also been said: Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a writ of dismissal. But I say this to you: everyone who divorces his wife, except for the case of fornication, makes her an adulteress; and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

> "Again, you have learnt how it was said to our ancestors: You must not break your oath, but must fulfil your oaths to the Lord. But I say this to you: do not swear at all,< either by heaven, since that is God's throne; or by the earth, since that is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, since that is the city of the great king. Do not swear by your own head either, since you cannot turn a single hair white or black. > All you need say is 'Yes' if you mean yes, 'No' if you mean no; anything more than this comes from the evil one."

The Gospel of the Lord.< **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, (all bow during the next three lines)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

and the dead.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May this oblation, O Lord, we pray, cleanse and renew us and may it become for those who do your will the source of eternal reward. Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

They ate and had their fill, and what they craved the Lord gave them; they were not disappointed in what they craved.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Having fed upon these heavenly delights, we pray, O Lord, that we may always long for that food by which we truly live. Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.







The Hebrew handwritten Torah on a synagogue altar in Jerusalem

The passage in today's Gospel reading is often interpreted as Jesus' teaching being superior to the Law of Moses, and therefore Christian Gospel love being higher than Jewish legalism.

This is, in fact, a distortion of Matthew's presentation, in which Jesus says that he has not come to abolish but to fulfil the Law. The Torah is the revelation of God's will, and to observe it is to respond in covenant devotion to God: it is not a burden to be carried with fatalistic resignation.

There were many schools of thought about how the Torah could be lived out, and Jesus' teaching is more in line with the more liberal rabbis, except for his teaching on divorce. (It is not possible to give a definitive interpretation of what is called the exception clause, that is, except for the case of fornication.) Jesus urges his hearers to look at their inward emotions and not allow negative feelings to build up until they manifest themselves in action: lust can lead to adultery, anger to murder. It is not a question of Jesus bringing a new law or morality: he is interpreting the Torah commandments in a truly radical fashion, tackling the roots of sinful action.

The sayings about self-mutilation are not meant to be taken literally but to stress the urgency of taking seriously the source of sin: this is not located in the physical body, but in the mind.

your law, to keep it with

(Psalm 118:34)

LEARN

Jesus' teaching on divorce is (unusually) closer to the strict interpretation of the Rabbi Shammai.

His interpretation of the Torah is normally nearer to that of the more liberal Rabbi Hillel.

In every period, there were two main teachers of the Torah, one strict, the other less so.

DO

Think about Jesus' teaching on being reconciled with someone before coming to worship God. If this teaching applies to you, go and do something about it.

REFLECT

he Law of Moses which we find in the Bible bears the hallmarks of development and adjustment to different situations due to the changes in Israelite society. The Pharisees in the synagogues of Jesus' time sought to interpret the Torah in such a way that the values it proposed could be put into practice in people's daily lives. There were different views on the subject, some strict, others more accommodating, but there was no one, official line which everyone was expected to follow in the name of 'orthodoxy'.

One of the frequent complaints about politicians and other public figures is that people find it hard to believe what they say. Jesus tells us today that we should be straightforward and honest in our dealings with others. Swearing by anything as a guarantee of our truthfulness is to rely on an external object, whereas our own personal integrity should be sufficient. That is the message coming through the various diverse sections of today's Gospel.

It might also be helpful to reflect that the Judaism of the time of Jesus was broad

enough to accommodate all shades of opinion. One of the distressing aspects of discourse in the church (and beyond) is the lack of charity and the attributing of bad faith to people with whom there is disagreement. Jesus was not condemned by people of differing theological opinions, but by conservative religious authority figures who interpreted the Law literally, accepted no development of understanding and were mainly interested in preserving their political position. In essential matters, unity; in uncertain matters, liberty; in all matters, charity.