

Jims Notes for July 19, 2006

The Gospel According to St. Matthew 5:27-32

St. John Chrysostom (died A.D. 407)

For he did not simply say whoever shall desire, since it is possible for one to desire even when sitting alone in the mountains. Rather, Jesus said, whoever looks with lust, that is, one who thinks about another solely for the purpose of lusting, who, under no compulsion, allows the wild beast to intrude upon his thoughts when they are calm. This intrusion no longer comes from nature but from self-indulgence. The ancient Scripture corrects this from the first, saying, "Don't gaze upon another's beauty" (Sirach 9:8). And then, so that no one should say, if I gaze but am not taken captive, he punishes the look, lest through a false security you should some time fall into sin. "What then," one may say, "if I should look, and desire indeed, but do no evil?" Even so you find your place among the adulterers. For the Lawgiver has pronounced it, and you must not question further. For when you look once, twice or three times, you will perhaps have power to refrain; but if you make this your habitual practice, kindling the furnace within you, you will assuredly be overcome. Your human nature is no different from that of other people. If we see a child holding a knife, though we don't see him hurt, we spank him and forbid him to ever do so again. In the same way, God removes the licentious look even before the act, lest at any time you should fall in act also. For he who has once kindled the flame, even when the woman whom he has beheld is absent, is forming continually within himself images of shameful things. The images often lead even to the concrete act. Hence Christ takes away even that embrace which is in the heart only. (The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 17.2.2).

St. Chromatius of Aquileia (died A.D. 407)

Because adultery is a serious sin and in order to uproot it, lest our conscience be defiled, he forbade even lust, which is the fuel of adultery. According to the words of blessed James in his epistle, "Lust when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death" (James 1:15). The Holy Spirit speaks concerning this to David: "Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock" (Psalm 137:9). The symbolism here is that the blessed and truly evangelical person roots out the desires and lust of the flesh arising from human weakness. He does this immediately before they grow, at the onset, through faith in Christ who has been described as a rock (see I Corinthians 10:4). (Tractate on Matthew 23.1.6-7).

Apollinarius, bishop of Laodicea (died A.D. 392)

He speaks about the numbers of the body but employs hyperbole. It is not that one should literally cut off one's members. Rather, one is called to mortify them and render them useless for sin, as the apostle has said (see Colossians 3:5, I Corinthians 9:27). One should not spare even things thought most necessary, if through them any bad activity threatens to occur. (Fragment 23).

St. Hilary of Poitiers (died A.D. 368)

As the degree of innocence increases, faith becomes more advanced. For we are advised to be free not only from our own particular faults but also from those things that affect us outwardly. For is it not because of sin that the bodily members were condemned in the first place? The right eye is no less sinister than the left. It is pointless to chastise a foot that is unaware of lust and thus involves no grounds for punishment. But our members indeed do differ from each other while we are all one body. We are here being advised to pluck out inordinate loves or friendships if they are the occasion that leads us further into wrongdoing. We would do well to not even have the benefit of a member, like an eye or a foot, if it furnishes the avenue by which one is drawn by excessive affections into a partnership with hell. Even the cutting away of a member might be beneficial if the heart (figuratively speaking) were also able to be cut away. But if the impulse of the heart is left unchanged, the cutting away of a member would be pointless. (On Matthew 4.21).

St. Augustine of Hippo (died A.D. 430)

In this connection, I can think of no more fitting example than that of a dearly beloved friend, for that which we ardently love is certainly that which we may rightly call a member. And we may rightly call this member a counselor, for he is, as it were, an eye that shows the way, and because he is on the right side, we may rightly call him a counselor in divine matters. In this way, a friend on the left side is indeed a counselor, but a counselor in earthly matters, which pertain to the needs of the body. However, it would be superfluous to talk about him insofar as he may be an occasion of sin, since not even the friend on the right side is to be spared. But a counselor in divine matters is actually a stumbling block if, under the guise of religion and doctrine, he is trying to lead us into some pernicious belief. Let the right hand therefore be understood as a beloved helper and minister in divine works. For, just as contemplation is properly represented by the word *eye*, so action is rightly represented by the word *hand*. In this way, the left hand signifies the works that are necessary for this life and body. (Sermon on the Mount 1.13.38).

St. Chromatius of Aquileia (died A.D. 407)

In all things our Lord and Savior reforms for the better the justice of the ancient law. Indeed, it seems that long ago a license for divorce was granted by Moses on tenuous grounds to the Jewish people who were living licentiously and serving their pleasures. This was due not to the system of law but to the unbridled pleasure of a carnal people unable to uphold the righteousness of the law according to rigorous standards.

This concession was allowed, according to what the Lord himself said in another place in his reply to the inquiring Sadducees. For when they asked why Moses had allowed a bill of divorce to be given, the Lord answered, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so." (Matthew 19:8). And now, not without good reason does our Lord and Savior, with that license removed, restore the precepts of his former constitution. For he orders that chaste wedlock be preserved by indissoluble law, showing that the law of marriage was first instituted by himself. For he said, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6 Mark 10:9). (Tractate on Matthew 24.1.1-3.24).

Πορνείας (porneias) "unchastity": The Greek word used here appears to refer to marriages which were not legally marriages, because they were either within the forbidden degrees of consanguinity (Leviticus 18:6-16) or contracted with a Gentile. The phrase

“except on the ground of unchastity” does not occur in the parallel passage in Luke 16: 18. See also Matthew 19:9 (Mark 10:11-12), and especially 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, which shows that the prohibition is unconditional. The phrase, “except on the ground of unchastity”, should not be taken as indicating an exception to the principle of the absolute indissolubility of marriage which Jesus has just re-established. It is almost certain that the phrase refers to unions accepted as marriage among some pagan peoples, but prohibited as incestuous in the Mosaic Law (see Leviticus 18) and in rabbinical tradition. The reference, then, is to unions radically invalid because of some impediment. When persons in this position were converted to the true faith, it was not that their union could be dissolved; it was declared that they had never in fact been joined in true marriage. Therefore, this phrase does not go against the indissolubility of marriage, but rather reaffirms it.

On the basis of Jesus’ teaching and guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church has ruled that in the specially grave case of adultery it is permissible for a married couple to separate, but without the marriage bond being dissolved; therefore, neither party may contract a new marriage.

The indissolubility of marriage was unhesitatingly taught by the Church from the very beginning; she demanded practical and legal recognition of this doctrine, expounded with full authority by Jesus (Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18) and by the Apostles (1 Corinthians 6:16; 7:10-11, 39; Romans 7:2-3; Ephesians 5:31f). (Notes for Matthew 5:32 *The Navarre Bible, St. Matthew*, pp. 65-66).