

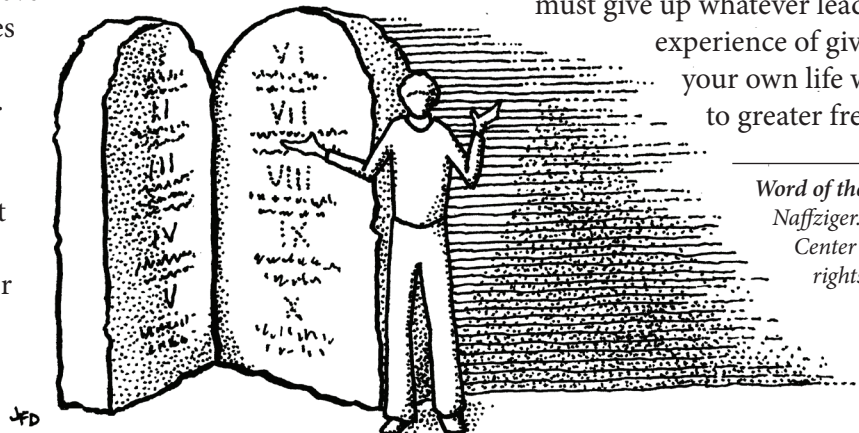
# The Value Behind the Laws

*This Week's Readings at Mass*

- Sirach 15:15-20 • Our free will
- 1 Corinthians 2:6-10 • True wisdom
- Matthew 5:17-37 • The old Law and the new

This long excerpt from the Sermon on the Mount demonstrates both how thoroughly Jewish Jesus was in his understanding of the world, and also how radical he was in his interpretation of Jewish laws. Matthew makes it clear that Jesus has great respect for his religious tradition; he has not come to throw out Jewish teachings and start a new religion. He has come to shed light on ancient teachings and to challenge people to look for and embrace the spirit behind the letter of the law.

Jesus calls out the scribes and the Pharisees who have gotten so caught up in trying to win their salvation or the favor of others by obeying the rules perfectly that they have lost sight of the original intent behind them. The Pharisees and scribes aren't alone in their vice—there are some people in every religion who get off track in this way. Jesus wants his listeners to look deeper than the laws themselves. What is the value they are trying to uphold? How are they offering life, and a fuller life, to those who would follow them? For example, many of us can avoid murdering another human being, but none of us escapes being angry at others. Jesus is pointing out that we need to look at the root of our behavior (anger and lust in this passage) to see where we are imprisoned. Anger, without murder, still imprisons us and the person we are angry with. Lust, even without adultery, does harm to our most intimate relationship. So let's not let ourselves off the hook like the Pharisees just because we seem to have our acts together on the surface. Let's look for where we



DECISION-MAKING IS TOUGH. CONSIDER THE CHOICES: THERE'S 'A'...

THERE'S 'B'. THERE'S...

OKAAAY. SO I GUESS I'M THANKFUL THAT I'M A SHEEP!

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“Before everyone are life and death, whichever they choose will be given them.”

**Sheepish Question:**

There are only two choices. Why is it so hard sometimes for me to go with God's way?

can invite in more freedom, compassion, and graciousness—for our sake and for the sake of everyone we are in relationship with.

## Questions of the Week

- 1 The commandments that Jesus mentions aren't arbitrary rules handed down on from on high just to make our lives harder. They invite us to greater freedom. Share an example of how choosing to follow a law, commandment, or teaching from the Bible has made your life better or richer in some way, even if it was difficult?
- 2 Jesus uses hyperbole in his saying “if your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out...” This is not meant literally, but is a metaphor for saying that we must give up whatever leads us to sin. Share an experience of giving up something in your own life which ultimately led to greater freedom.

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