

Homily 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2026

'The foolish follow rules blindly, the wise use rules for guidance. (Anon)

The story goes that an old Chinese farmer's favourite horse ran off. The villagers came saying, 'Oh that was bad luck!' The old farmer wisely replied, 'Bad luck, good luck? Who knows? Weeks later the horse returned with a whole herd of wild horses. The villagers said, 'Oh that was good luck!' The old man wisely replied, 'Good luck, bad luck? Who knows?' Whilst the old farmer's son was riding one of the wild horses to break it in, he was unseated and thrown to the ground, badly fracturing his arm. The villagers turned up again, 'Oh that was bad luck!' The wise farmer replied, 'Bad luck. good luck? Who knows? A few weeks later the Revolutionary Guard rode into the village to conscript the young men for war duty, but the old man's son was spared due to his severely broken arm. The villagers piped up, 'Oh that was good luck!' The wise farmer replied, 'Good luck, bad luck? Who knows?' The old Chinese farmer consistently made wise decisions, never taking the simplistic and quick solutions to what life threw at him. He wanted to see the full picture before deciding if it was good or bad luck.

In today's First Reading from Sirach, Wisdom Literature, The Chosen People too are urged to make wise choices by following The Law of God, The Torah. The Wisdom Writer says, 'For in doing so is the wisdom of the Lord.' The Responsorial Psalm also endorses the message that the wise follow God's Law, '*Blessed are those who walk in the law of the LORD!* Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his decrees!' So, we make wise choices when we respect and keep the Commandments of God

St Paul in 2 Corinthians warns us to be aware of the dangers of following blindly man-made laws some which challenge God's will and his Law, ' Brothers and Sisters: Among the mature we give wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.'

Man made Law can indeed be 'an ass'. You only need to think about the laws which fail to protect the unborn child or the vulnerable at the end of life. Let's compare these laws with the wisdom of Jesus in today's Gospel. Today, St Matthew continues to explain The Beatitudes, the new Law of loving God and loving our neighbour, 'You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not murder"; but I say to you that everyone who deliberately hates his brother or sister is already committing murder in his heart.' Again, 'You have heard it said, "You shall not commit adultery", but I say to you anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'

Even man-made Church Law, if applied without wisdom can pre-judge, condemning people in blanket fashion without considering the individual's full story. I have a friend who was recently yelled at, 'Get out of MY church!', before she could even explain her situation. She was seeking comfort and counsel from her priest after divorcing from her abusive and adulterous husband. Even though Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce acknowledges that sexual immorality should not be tolerated in Christian marriage, the woman's 'case' was dismissed by her shepherd. Jesus in today's Gospel states, 'It was also said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce." But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, EXCEPT ON THE GROUNDS OF SEXUAL IMMORALITY, makes her commit adultery. Surely, the priest could have shown

compassion, listened to her story with love and understanding and perhaps recommending to her, either the formal process of annulment or the informal process of 'Internal Forum' * to consider the evidence of her situation. Instead, he alienated her and cruelly excluded her from her Catholic community.

In the Beatitudes Jesus introduces us to the New Law of Love. He clearly expects the highest standards in our behaviour and dealings with others. A good person will, however, always make some mistakes in life but a great person will always admit to his/her mistakes. As one very wise priest once told me, 'The first step to holiness John, is to admit you are a humble, poor sinner.' Just like the tax-collector in The Temple (parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector Lk18: 9-14) the woman accepted the irregularity of her situation and, although innocent, she also felt remorse about her divorce. Beating her breast, she humbly approached her shepherd for advice. Surely, at the very least, she should have been listened to, felt respected as a daughter of God and, like the remorseful tax-collector in The Temple, gone home feeling 'justified in God's sight' because of her humility.

*** Internal Forum**

In the Catholic Church, the "internal forum" refers to matters of a person's conscience and spiritual life that are handled privately, usually between the individual and God, often with a priest acting as confessor or spiritual guide.

It's contrasted with the "external forum," which deals with public, visible, and legally verifiable matters in the Church (like tribunals, marriage records, annulments, or disciplinary actions).

Key features of the internal forum

- Private and confidential: It concerns a person's inner moral and spiritual state.
- Usually within confession or spiritual direction: Most commonly exercised in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Conscience-focused: Deals with guilt, repentance, forgiveness, moral responsibility, and personal discernment in ethical issues.
- Protected by secrecy: especially, but throughout the process, in confession the priest is bound by the seal of confession/confidentiality and can never reveal what is said.

Examples

- A person confessing sins to a priest.
- Spiritual guidance about moral decisions such as divorce and remarriage and communion with The Church
- Personal repentance and reconciliation with God.

Internal vs. external forum (simple comparison)

Internal forum	External forum
Private	Public/official
Conscience and spiritual life	Church law and visible actions
Confession, spiritual direction	Marriage tribunals, official permissions
Known only to the individual and priest	Recorded and verifiable

In summary:

The internal forum is the Church's sphere of personal conscience and spiritual reconciliation, handled privately—most especially in confession—rather than through public legal or administrative processes, such as A Marriage Tribunal.