

Seventh Sunday After the Epiphany (Proper 2)
Cycle A RCL
Revised

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18

The Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26) occurs within the Priestly Writer's great law book. Although the Priestly Writer (P) composed his work in exile during the middle of the 6th century, the Holiness Code (H) must be an earlier body of priestly regulations that stemmed from the period of the monarchy before the Exile in 586 BCE. The theme of the code is well expressed in today's reading: "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." (NRSV) As 19:9-18 makes clear, Israel's holiness is not only a matter of keeping the laws of clean and unclean but also of acting justly with neighbors and providing for their needs. The remarkable prohibition against the grudge (verses 17-18) includes the equally remarkable commandment to love neighbor as self (19:18). Here the law code goes well beyond what law courts could enforce to deal with the matter of intentionality.

Psalms 119:33-40

In this long acrostic *wisdom psalm*, each strophe begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The current selection comprises the verses for the letter *he*. Wisdom psalms did not grow up in the Jerusalem temple but in the wisdom schools of Jerusalem and later during the Babylonian Exile. Their function was to help the young courtier learn the customs and values of Israel and to that end they were designed to facilitate memorization.

1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

One of the fundamental problems among the Corinthian Christians was the fact that they had divided themselves up into parties or sects according to the person who had baptized them. Paul takes pains to argue that his work among them, including baptism, served only to build a house that has Christ, not Paul as its foundation. He goes on to argue against another false teaching of his enemies, the claim that Christian faith involves such a dramatic release from the constraints of law and convention that Christians are free to lead an immoral lifestyle. The argument about the body as the temple of God, not to be defiled by immorality, stands in contradistinction to the popular slogan that the body (*soma*) was the tomb (*sema*) of the soul.

Matthew 5:38-48

Some Christians take these words of Jesus as showing the moral superiority of his teaching over that Judaism. In point of fact, these teachings sound very much like those of the Pharisees. The Pharisaic sages taught their students that they should "build a hedge around the Torah" (*m. Avot* 1:1), *i. e.* they should create broad rules that would keep them from having to deal with the minutiae of the law. For example, in Exodus 23:19; 34:26 and Deuteronomy 14:21 we find the rule, "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk." One could, of course, try to check the ancestry of every piece of meat cooked for food, but that would be a mind-numbing exercise. The "hedge around the Torah" in this case was that one never prepare meat and milk dishes together for the same meal. Like the Pharisees, Jesus also taught his students that arguing the fine points of Jewish law would not make anyone righteous. Jesus, in addition to simplifying the requirements imposed on a disciple, oriented his simplifications toward non-violence and love as many Pharisees had already done.