We just heard a very long gospel. I, therefore, will preach a very short homily. I chose the long form because it is infinitely more important that you hear Jesus’ words than my words.

Jesus proclaims, “I have come not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it.” He continues, “You have heard it said, ‘you shall not kill, ... you shall not commit adultery, ... you shall not bear false witness.” All those laws are important to keep. Those laws coincide with universal natural law, all major religions, and apparently the Pharisees themselves tried their best to keep these laws.

Jesus, however, goes deeper than the stated Law. He adds, “But I say to you, ... you shall not be angry, ... or lustful, ... or liars.” Why does Jesus say this? ... Because Jesus gets to the root of our sins. These lesser sins oftentimes lead to greater sins. Also law exists not just to direct our behaviors but also to develop our relationships ... with God and other people. Jesus desires for us more than formalistic, legalistic adherence to Law. Jesus wants us to follow the law for the right reasons. Law and spirit matter. Without God’s law, we’d be lawless and living in confusion and chaos. Without spirit, the temptation would be just to go through the motions, following the Law mindlessly, without much heart or soul.

Overall, Jesus invites us to be happy and holy. By following the law, we will be happy. Why? Because “happiness results from achieving good goals by good means.” By following the law, we will be holy. Why? Because “holiness is a God-given gift which results from desiring and doing God’s will.” And by following the law in Jesus’ spirit, we will be joyful. Because “joy results from an emotional response to the experience of harmony.”

Today’s first reading from Sirach advises us, “I set before you life and death, good and evil.” May I encourage you to choose goodness, choose life, choose Jesus’ way of living life. And the result is that you will be happy, holy and joyful.