

The Second Sunday After Pentecost – June 7, 2026 – Fr. John Warfel

I admit it; I listen to country music  
especially the songs from the 80's and 90's  
Heck, I even two-step

*I Won't Take Less than Your Love* is one of my favorite country songs  
Recorded by Tanya Tucker,  
This song showcases three examples of servitude and gratitude;

And the receiver-  
a man devoted to his wife,  
a grateful son,  
and a Christian deeply committed to serving God-  
all three seek a way to repay the giver,

Each one responds with the song's title line,  
*I Won't Take Less than Your Love*  
The lesson being that **love** is worth more than all the riches,  
Comforts and treasures of the world.

Today's readings reflect our human desire to please God:  
What pleases God and what does not.  
Those who believe that scripture is the inerrant word of God;  
that Moses wrote the first five Books of the Old Testament  
They must have a difficult time reconciling Leviticus with Hosea, Psalm 50 and  
Jesus

The first seven chapters of Leviticus are instructions on ritual offerings  
Burnt offerings, sin offerings, offerings of thanksgiving  
These are not suggestions; they are mandates, legalistic absolutes,  
A systematic formula for not only pleasing God but also for placating God

Then around 750 BCE the Prophet Hosea shows up  
Hosea preaches a different message  
A message challenging the rigorous demands of Leviticus

Hosea says: *God desires steadfast love and not sacrifice*  
Instead of burnt offerings, God wants us to know God **through relationship**;  
A mutual loving relationship.

Echoing this theme even earlier  
The writer of Psalm 50 demonstrates the futility of animal sacrifices  
*I do not accuse you because of your sacrifices;  
your offerings are always before  
Do you think I eat the flesh of bulls,  
Or drink the blood of goats?*

*For all the beasts of the forest are all mine anyway.*  
You have nothing to give me, nothing at all,  
Nothing except a relationship  
A relationship based on love  
Not fear, not bargaining, not toadying, not attempts to control  
But a **relationship** based on **steadfast love**.

Humans are forever forgetting this  
We make it so complicated  
The Hebrews had 613 Laws  
In the Middle Ages, the Church had an elaborate system of indulgences.  
Where you could literally buy your way into Heaven

During Jesus' earthly ministry  
The Pharisees thrived on the Holiness Code  
A demanding set of rules that yielded self-righteousness and pride  
A set of shalts and shalt nots that blinded their eyes-  
To the point that they could not even recognize the Messiah, the Christ

Why does this man eat with tax collectors and sinners?  
He can't be the Messiah; he breaks the rules  
It is not lawful to eat with the unclean

Jesus says, Go and learn what this means:  
I desire mercy, not sacrifice.  
And I've come to call sinners, not the righteous.

Jesus did not have a particularly high regard for the righteous  
The religious experts,  
Those who meticulously followed the letter of the Law;  
While ignoring the Spirit of the Law  
Those who used the law to exclude, condemn and look down upon the great  
unwashed

Jesus calls them *white washed tombs*;  
Pretty on the outside but rotten on the inside  
Jesus didn't come to call the righteous  
The righteous are incapable of understanding God's message of love;  
they're too busy being right

Ah, but sinners...  
Those who admit that they don't have all the answers and that they are incomplete  
These are the ones Jesus came for  
These are the ones that are open to a relationship, a Flow, a steadfast love  
These are the ones whom Christ comes to call, heal, restore.

*I desire mercy and steadfast love,  
Not sacrifices and burnt offerings*  
I desire a tender, vulnerable heart not prideful obedience  
I desire vulnerability to a perspective larger than self  
**Mercy and steadfast love**  
This is how we please God.

*How much do I owe you?" said the man to his Lord. (sung?)  
For giving me this day and every day that's gone before  
Shall I build a temple, shall I make a sacrifice?  
Tell me Lord and I will pay the price.*

*And the Lord said: I won't take less than your love, sweet love  
No, I won't take less than your love  
All the treasures of the world could never be enough  
And I won't take less than your love.*