



23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

In the first reading (Ez 33:7-9) the Lord tells Ezekiel that He has appointed him to be a watchman for Israel. When he hears the Lord, he is to warn Israel. If God says to tell the wicked that he will surely die and Ezekiel fails to warn him, the wicked will die but God will hold Ezekiel responsible for his death. However, if he does warn him and he refuses to turn from his way, the wicked will die but Ezekiel will save himself.

Something to Think About:

1. Ezekiel's prophetic ministry began before the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians but today's context occurred at a later time after the fall. Ezekiel was part of the first 8,000 Judeans that the Babylonians took into exile in 597 BC. His prophetic role was to warn not only Judah as a country but also wicked individuals when God would point them out to him. While we are not God's prophets in the same sense that Ezekiel was, we too are often inspired by the Holy Spirit to speak up when we see someone acting against God's will. The question we should ask ourselves is whether God will hold us responsible if we should fail to speak up?

2. We all love a hero: e.g. the firefighter who goes into the midst of flames to carry out a child, a person who jumps into chilly waters to rescue someone who fell through the ice, the soldier who jumps on a grenade to save his buddies in the foxhole, the person who stands up to a group of thugs to protect another but ends up brutalized himself, etc. We all love heroes. We imagine what we would do if we were presented with such circumstances but seldom, if ever, does that happen. However would it not be so much more heroic if instead of saving a physical life we saved a spiritual life from eternal damnation? We see such evil often, if not daily. We have an opportunity to act. We can be a hero. The question is will we act?

In the second reading (Rom 13:8-10) Paul tells the Romans that they ought not owe anyone anything except love. The one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments concerning adultery, killing, stealing, coveting, and so on are summed up in the saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no evil to the neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.

Something to Think About:

1. The love that Paul is speaking about in this passage is agape love. It is not primarily about an emotional sort of love but about action. It is desiring good for your neighbor. When God gave the law to Moses, He wrote them on two tablets. The first had to do with love of God: no idolatry, no blasphemy and keep the Sabbath holy. The second had to do with love of neighbor: honor parents, not kill, not commit adultery, not steal, not lie, and not covet your neighbor's wife or goods. Jesus summed these up as love of God and love of neighbor. Paul noted that love satisfies the latter.

2. Paul was accused of being a law breaker because he did not require Gentiles to be circumcised but allowed them to enter into a covenantal relationship with God through baptism alone. Because of this some Christian groups argue that all a person needs to do is to believe in Jesus and that it does not matter what they do. They generally say that you should not commit adultery, kill, steal, or covet but that your salvation does not depend on your avoiding these things. Paul is clearly of the opinion that those who fail to obey the commandments will not inherit the kingdom of God.

In the gospel (Mt 18:15-20) Jesus tells His disciples that if your brother sins against you, go tell him his fault. If he listens to you, you have won him over. If he does not listen take one or two others with you, so that the fact can be established on the testimony of

two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen to the church, treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. If two of you agree about anything for which they pray, it will be granted to them by my Father. Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.

Something to Think About:

1. The process of admonishing a wrongdoer in this three-step process is similar to that found in the *Manual of Discipline* that belonged to the Essenes and in rabbinic writings. It is always desirable for a member of the community to recognize his/her error, repent and return to the community for God desires that all people to be saved. When someone wrongs us, we often do the opposite of what Jesus is telling us to do in this passage. We shun the person, turn away in anger, seek revenge or begin to gossip about him or her. We should go to the person first in humility and forgiveness. This is what Jesus is asking us to do this one-on-one with the other person and not to do so publicly. This is difficult to do but it leads to the restoration the relationship with the other person.

2. Next, if the person does not listen on a one-for-one basis, Jesus says to bring one or two others along with you when confronting the other person. If you are in the right, they will agree with you and help you to convince the other person of his/her error. If you are in the wrong, they will help you see the error of your thinking. The hope is that the other person would be willing to listen to the wise counsel of these others that come along with you and repent.

3. If the erring person still refuses to listen, Jesus says that you are to tell it to the church. The idea is not to go to the church that they should discipline the person but once again to aid the person in seeing their fault, to repent and be restored. God always desires that the sinner to repent and to return to Him. This should be borne in mind when the church binds and loses. The first time Jesus used these words the power to forgive sins was given to Peter and the apostles as in the sacrament of confession. This time it is given to the church at large and concerns disciplinary matters.

4. When two or more believers come together to pray in the Holy Spirit according to the will of the Father it will be granted to them. In context this means that

the process of correcting a member of the community will be exercised more justly and mercifully when it is done with prayer in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Praying for someone who has gone astray ought to be the first effort among others in attempting to rescue him/her.

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