

Twenty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle A (Correcting & Reconciliation)

Ezekiel 33: 7-9; Rm 13: 8-10; Mt 18: 15-20

There is a story of reconciliation. Sometimes in the past, during election period, there were two best friends who ran for mayor in a certain town. They were the best of friends, but during the campaign period they attacked each personally to win the election. Instead of talking about their platform of government, they talked to the people their personal lives, then. So after the election, the two best friends became mortal enemies. Both of their families were worried and tried the two reconcile with each but no success. So, both families went to the parish priest and asked him to help them. The parish priest called the two to discuss the problem and in no time the matter was settled. And now they are again the best of friends all the more.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

One of the most difficult things in life is correcting or reconciliation another person. It isn't easy to bring about reconciliation within persons and the family or community. This is a very sensitive, challenging and difficult thing to do. Besides, there are some people who do not have the courage to correct anyone. Or we often tell ourselves that it is not our duty or our business to correct anyone.

All of today's readings bring us a message of love, which is very clear in this teaching: if we do not correct those in error, we cannot love them. For example, Parents often correct their small children almost automatically and know that it is a loving thing to do. Once a child gets older, parents have to make a choice to correct their children, especially when they know that the child sometimes will not accept correction easily, but they still try to do because their duty and love.

Today's first reading is an oracle of appointment. The Prophet Ezekiel was called by God to be a watchman. He was entrusted with keeping watch over the entire house of Israel. He was told by the Lord to correct or to warn people of their sinful ways and to return back to God. The Lord bluntly told the prophet Ezekiel: if he does not tell others their faults and dissuade them from evil, then he will be held responsible for their deaths. We can see that God reminds us through Prophet Ezekiel, that we have a responsibility towards one another. This is especially with regards to correcting, counseling, advising and warning others of the consequences of their actions in order to save them. It is also a prelude to the gospel where Jesus instructs his followers and us how to help each other stay on the right track.

In our second reading, Saint Paul declared: *"Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law"* Clearly when the message we share with others is one of love, our motives cannot ever be misinterpreted. Saint Paul's teaching on love reminds us that if we should try to correct on another. It should be done with out of love. Yet we often think of love as simply feeling good about one another.

How do we react when someone wrongs us?

We can respond in different ways when someone wrongs us. We can ignore the offense, cut off the offender, announce our anger or hurt, or equally offensive. Perhaps we have tried each of these. Today's gospel reading, Jesus sets out several ways for his disciples and us how to deal with a neighbor who has wronged us. The Evangelist Matthew presents to us the process of reconciliation that Jesus outlines a three-step process to be followed in achieving reconciliation.

The first step is to talk it over with the person who sinned against us. We talk with the person personally about his or her wrongdoings and faults. We try to sway them to give up their wrongdoing. In this step, we must sit down and dialogue one on one, and face to face - only between the two of persons. This is a private affair, in order to avoid embarrassment.

Experience teaches us that many times when we talk to the person who hurt us, we are liberated, the hurt becomes less painful and we begin to understand the incident in a new light. If this step doesn't work, then do the second step.

The second step is to talk it over with him or her in the presence of witnesses. We look for a mediator between you and the offender, a neutral person in a neutral place. We talk to the person in the presence of two or three friends or witnesses and tell them when they are committing a wrong. In the final verses of today's Gospel, Jesus says that when two or three are gathered together in his name, "there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). So we understand that fraternal correction is always undertaken with Jesus present to us. Likewise, encouraging the good in others is not only the right thing for us to do, it is a necessity. So this step should be done in a prayer for guidance, and never done by hate and not by revenge because our purpose is to bring someone back. If that person is not amenable, then go to the third step.

The third step is to seek the mediation of our community or family. We bring this case to the church or ask advices from priests or religious about the matter. And remember, love should be the basis of our fraternal correction and not anger. These processes remind us that dialogue and mutual love is the best method of to promote reconciliation. But based on our experience, in the first step, there is already reconciliation happen between the offender and the offended party. This passage is always a powerful reminder to us that it is more important to rebuild relationships with others than to terminate them.

However, many people don't like to change if they are comfortable with their way of life.

But don't get discouraged if we try to lead someone away from doing something that is harming them. At least we have done all we can. If our efforts fall on deaf ears, there is always prayer, which Jesus reminds us of at the end of today's gospel reading. Prayer is something we can and should always do for those we care about and want to help. Therefore, we try our best to have the courage to confront the person without hurting the other person.

Brothers and Sisters,

Today's gospel encourages all of us to do what we can to help and lead another, who is straying from God's ways, back to our Lord. This is a very sensitive, challenging and difficult thing to do. All must always be done in justice and love to bring them back. We are not proposing we are holier than anyone else. God will judge that. We just try to do what we think our Lord wants. We may need to ask God for the courage to face how they have wronged us and tell them of their failure. We pray to the spirit whose work is to bring about the unity of love among our friends, in our family, neighborhood, and community.

During this Mass, let us pray for those people we want to correct and we want to reconcile. Let us also pray that our minds and hearts be one in forgiveness, especially we join our voices in prayer for each other with the Lord's Prayer which Jesus taught us: "*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.*" This is a wonderful prayer. It is because this prayer can lead us to do the right thing. We know that the right thing is to forgive each other and to accept responsibility for each other, and in doing that, we experience Jesus' presence in our own lives. Amen!