

45 Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A September 10, 2017
Ezekiel 33:7-9 Psalm 93 Romans 13:8-10 Matthew 18:15-20

In today's Gospel, Jesus says to His disciples, "If your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone." He doesn't say, "Put up with it, suffer it, endure it." He says, "Go and confront him or her with his or her wrongdoing." Although very sensitive and extremely hard to practice, Jesus' challenge of *fraternal correction* is probably one of the most difficult to live out and yet it is vital in our faith.

It goes without saying that the correction of offending acts by our brothers and sisters in Christ are seldom welcomed and those who need it most always like it least. Correction is never easy nor received easily and can be embarrassing as it may carry with it the risk of losing a long established friendship. People are sensitive to correction, and rightly so, if it is not done in charity and if it is not done tactfully.

Jesus encourages us to be open and honest with each other and to be attentive when someone sins against us or against the community. Being honest with a person when we know he or she has sinned is a way of showing respect to that person, a way of bringing peace and a way of living the message of the Gospel to "love your neighbour as yourself."

Jesus' words carry a very clear message concerning our responsibility towards the salvation of others within our family, within our community. To carry out this responsibility does not mean we are to be prying busybodies and interfering in people's lives. Yet, Jesus teaches us to go to the person who is sinning and talk it over. Some people find it much easier to simply cut someone off rather than become involved in correcting their offending acts or commit the sin of omission by remaining silent.

Instead of facing the person who should be confronted in charity, many people are tempted to discuss the matter in uncharitable gossip, criticism, backbiting, or name-calling. When someone goes around telling others about the wrong that was done by another person, this achieves nothing, except to spread the poisonous sins of hatred, anger, and lies. Instead of drawing back the

offender to Christ, to the Church, and to the community, the gap has now become widened. The return of the sinner has been made more difficult. We should never correct out of anger, or with the desire to punish.

Out of His heart of love, Jesus calls us to help our brothers and sisters in Christ, to seek the best for them and to lead them back to the Father. Sometimes this may include saying things that are difficult in order to protect and nurture their relationship with God. We love because Christ first loved us, and out of this love, we seek to build one another up in our Lord. Without the love of Christ, we risk speaking out of self-righteousness, or judgment, or out of feelings of superiority. We can easily understand how such correction could result in hurt and shame.

Parents sometimes have to say difficult things to their children in order to help them grow. Most parents recognize the challenge of correcting out of love rather than out of frustration or anger. The goal of parenting is to guide our children to Christian adulthood so that they can receive their full inheritance and rights as children of God. In the same way, God loves and disciplines us, His beloved children. God created us to live in unity with Him and with each other.

Love is the one way that cannot hurt the offender. If we have the ability to convey a genuine concern, a little honest discussion in charity can often clear the air and restore our relationship with the person. Regardless of our feelings for others, we are to love them, to help whenever we can, to build them up rather than tear them down.

With people we love, that may be easier to do. With those we do not love, it can be very difficult. It is worth remembering that not one of us is perfect, so when we point out the faults of another person, we should do so with love, with kindness, and with gentleness. Harsh words and an aggressive attitude have no place in our Catholic community.

St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7: "Love is always patient and kind; love is never jealous; love is not boastful or conceited, it is never rude and never seeks its own advantage; it does not take offence or store up grievances. Love

does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but finds its joy in truth. It is always ready to make allowances, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes.”

If the one-to-one approach fails then the next step Jesus tells us is in shared responsibility. Lastly, if the offending person fails to accept the evidence of two or three people, then tell it to the Church. If the offender refuses to listen even to the Church, then everything to correct the wrong has been done.

Whether the approach is made alone or with others or with the Church, it must all be part of prayer in action. Whoever has to correct another should pray beforehand for the light of truth, for courage of heart and for the tactful gentleness which will heal rather than wound, draw back rather than withdraw, and fan the flame of hope and love rather than the fire of bitterness.

In our prayer to correct an offending person, the positive act of charity would be to ask ourselves first, “What would Jesus do?” It is very important when we are seeking the prayers of others that we do not breach confidentiality by releasing the person’s name or the nature of the sin.

How precious are those close family and friends who love us like brothers and sisters? Our family and friends are special gifts from God. Community can be formed only when we help each other. Yes, reconciliation with a person can happen and it can lead to a greater growth in our community. We must be willing to challenge others, calling them to be holy people. In this way, we work together by leading and guiding each other to the kingdom of heaven.

In the celebration of our Mass today, let us join our voices in prayer for each other. This prayer should lead us to do the right thing. We know that the right thing is to accept responsibility and salvation for each other by offering prayer and peace, along with compassion and love.