

Homily of Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A, 2020

Ezekiel 33:7-9; Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9; Romans 13:13:8-10; Matthew 18:15-20

The people of Israel's disloyalty to God resulted to their conquest and captivity by Babylon. While in exile in Babylon, God did not abandon them. St. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:13, "If we are unfaithful he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself." God called one of them, Ezekiel, to prophesy to them. In the first reading, God spoke to Ezekiel, "I have appointed [you a] watchman for the house of Israel..." In the same way, God has called each one of us to watch over one another. Family members are called to watch over one another. Children have the responsibility to watch over their parents who watched over them as they grew up. Unfortunately, some children fail in this responsibility. Siblings are called to watch over one another. Neighbors are called to watch over one another. Church members are called to watch over one another. Colleagues are called to watch over one another. We are not called to fight and destroy one another.

There is a story of an old lady in Ireland who had no modern house heating system. She heated her house by burning firewood. The smoke of the fire oozed out of the house chimney every morning. On a particular morning, a neighbor living across from the old lady noticed that there was no smoke coming out of the old lady's house chimney. The neighbor was surprised that in the Irish cold the old lady was not heating her house that morning. The neighbor imagined that something was not okay. The neighbor went over and knocked on the lady's door but there was no response. The neighbor called the Emergency. The crew arrived, forced the house door open and found that the lady had fallen. The good news was that she was still alive. She was taken to the hospital where she recovered. Her life was saved by a good and observant neighbor who watched over her, even without her knowing!

Civil and religious leaders have the obligation to watch over the citizens. The leaders are not called to neglect, abandon, mistreat, abuse, starve, or devour the citizens.

God called Ezekiel to speak his words of truth to his people in order to save them. In the same way, God has called us to speak truth to one another, and save one another. Prophet Ezekiel says, "If you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I shall require from your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity, but you will have saved your life." St. James writes, "Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:20). Therefore, God has not called us to keeping silent in the face of evil, or to rumor mongering, gossiping, slandering and so on.

Sincerely watching over one another is an act of love. Telling one another the truth is an act of love. That is why St. Paul in the second reading says, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another... Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law."

In the Gospel, Jesus, further teaches us another act of love. It is, reconciling with one another. It takes a lot of humility and patience to follow these four stages of reconciliation Jesus commanded. Stage one: Don't presume, don't rumor, don't gossip, don't grudge, don't malign or slander. Go to the person and bring up your grievances. If the person refuses to reconcile with you, don't give up, proceed to stage two: Take someone of influence along, someone he/she may listen to, and go for a second round of reconciliatory talk. If the person still refuses to reconcile with you, don't give up still, proceed to stage three: Bring up the matter with the church leader, if the person practices his or her faith, or the leader of an organization the person belongs to or identifies with. After these three stages, and if the person still refuses to reconcile with you, then stage four: Accept the person with love; which is to say, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). That was what Jesus did to those who hated him and killed him.

To summarize, we are all called to show love to our brothers and sisters, and be our brother's and sister's keepers by watching over them; not watching their downfalls and failures; or being blind to their needs. We are called to show love to our brothers and sisters by speaking nothing but the truth to them. We are not to keep silent in the face of evil. We are called to show love to our brothers and sister by the act of reconciliation. May God give us the grace to answer these calls. Amen.

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