

Homily of Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A, 2023

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 in 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 appointed each one of us to watch over one another and to be one another's keeper. Priests are appointed to watch over the faithful and the faithful are to watch over their priests. Family members are appointed to watch over one another. Neighbors are appointed to watch over one another. Church members, coworkers, business partners, colleagues, and so on are appointed to watch over one another. We are not appointed to fight and destroy one another. Rulers and leaders are appointed to watch over the citizens; not to neglect, abandon, mistreat, abuse, starve, or devour them. Let no one be like Cain who murdered his brother and questioned God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9).

God called Ezekiel to speak his words of truth to his people in order to save them. In the same way, God calls us to speak truth to one another and to save one another. God 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 keep silent in the face of evil or to rumor, gossip, slander each other. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, "Silence in the face of evil is evil: God will not hold us guiltless."

Watching over one another and speaking truth to one another are acts 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 fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:8-10).

In today's 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 the four steps to reconciliation that Jesus commanded. Step one: Don't presume, don't rumor, don't gossip, don't hold grudges, don't malign or slander. Go to the person and speak up your grievances. If the person refuses to listen and reconcile with you, don't give up, proceed to step two: Take someone he/she may listen to and go for a second round of reconciliatory talk. If the person still refuses to reconcile, don't give up still, proceed to step 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 identifies with. After these three steps and the person still refuses to reconcile with you, then step four: "Love your enemies and pray for those

who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). Prayerfully, accept the person with empathy and love.

Jesus continues in today’s gospel, “Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:18-20).

While Jesus encourages us to gather, bind, loose, and pray; we are to do these without unforgiveness, bitterness, and hate. Proverbs 15:8, “The offering of the evil doer is disgusting to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight. Also, in Proverbs 15:29, “The Lord is far from the wicked, but hears the prayers of the righteous.” Jesus says in Mark 11:25, “When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance, so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you your transgressions.” Unforgiveness, bitterness, and hate render our gathering, binding, loosing, and prayer inefficacious.

I mentioned earlier that it takes a lot of humility and patience to forgive and to reconcile. The good news is the reward the Scripture promises: “The prayer of the humble passes through the clouds, and it will never stop until it draws near to God. It will never withdraw until the Most High takes notice, gives justice for the righteous, and executes judgment” (Sirach 35:21-22).

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP