



*Homily – 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)<sup>i</sup>*

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

In the Gospel reading we have just heard this morning, Jesus reminds us that in the Church, we are all brothers and sisters.

He has this to say to each one of us: “If your *brother* sins against you, go and tell him. ... If he listens to you, you have gained a *brother*.”

This is a command for how we are supposed to live our lives. We have to love one another. We have to help one another to live the way that God intends us to live.

Our Catholic Church is the family of God. And the readings of today’s Mass talk to us about that truth — and about what that means for our relationships with others.

In baptism, each one of us was filled with the Holy Spirit of God and we were made children of God. This is the beautiful gift of our Christian faith. And we have to always look at the world through this perspective of being sons and daughters of God.

Our faith opens our eyes to see that there is no one who is not our brother or sister. There is no one who does not have God as his Father. That means that no one can be a stranger to any of us. There is no one who is not worthy of our time, our attention, or our care.

So these readings today invite us to reflect on our relationships.

We all have a lot of people in our lives. People we have responsibilities for. Husbands or wives. Sons and daughters. Relatives and friends. Neighbors and co-workers.

These relationships are not random. These people in our lives are not “optional.” We cannot harden our hearts to any one.

*God* has placed all of these people in our lives. And God has placed *us* in *their* lives, too. Nothing goes on in our world or in any of our lives without God’s knowledge or care. And he entrusts all of us with the responsibility to care for one another.<sup>ii</sup> These people in our lives need us. And we need them.

In the first reading today, we hear that God made Ezekiel a “watchman over the house of Israel.”

That is a good way for us to think about our responsibilities as disciples. We have to be “watchmen” over the people to whom God has entrusted to our care.

We owe every one the duty of love, St. Paul tells us in the second reading today. We have the duty to love our neighbor as ourselves.

That is not always easy. Sometimes some of our relationships can be a real burden. We all that. And Jesus knows that, too.

Jesus understands our trials. He shares these trials with us. But he is always calling us in our Christian lives to rise above our concerns for ourselves.

Jesus has given us the model for how we are to live and to love. We are to love one another in the pattern that he showed us on the cross. By forgetting about ourselves, and by giving ourselves to others. By offering everything for the love of God and the love of our brothers and sisters.

Like Ezekiel, sometimes we have to challenge our brothers and sisters for the sake of heaven. Ezekiel was a prophet during a tough time for Israel. The time when the whole people was in exile in Babylon.

God called Ezekiel to teach and bear witness so that the people would keep the true faith while they were living far from the Holy Land in this strange society of Babylon.

And as Christians today in this culture, we have to have a similar attitude to Ezekiel. We have to help one another keep the faith in this culture, because this culture seems like it is getting “colder” to the ways of God and the values of religion.

So We have to keep listening for the Word of God. We have to keep listening to the teachings of our Church.

And we have to help one another to keep going in the right direction. By our example. By the teaching that we give by our words and actions.

To love our neighbors as ourselves is to be vitally concerned for their salvation. We have to be a people who forgive those who trespass against us. We must make every effort, as Jesus says today, to win our brothers and sisters back, to reconcile them to God and his Church.

My brothers and sisters, we have to always remember: God’s love is so much greater than any of our sins and weaknesses. And any of the sins and weakness we encounter in our friends and family.

Both Ezekiel and Jesus remind us today of the beautiful promise of God's tender mercy. All any of us has to do, is listen for his voice and turn to him in love. And he will forgive us!

These words of Jesus that we hear today — “Whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” — I think these are some of the most beautiful and hopeful words that have ever been spoken.

This Gospel passage is one of the biblical foundations for the Church's power and authority, to forgive sins in Jesus' name, through her bishops and priests.

So these words of Jesus should bring us amazement and joy!

Because they are a promise that in his Church, we will always encounter God's forgiveness. In his Church, we will find every good gift that we need to be free and holy people — the people God wants us to be.<sup>iii</sup>

So let us ask today for the grace to be better “watchmen” — to really make caring for those around us a priority in our lives.

And let us ask for the grace to make prayer a bigger priority in our lives.

Jesus talks about prayer at the end of the Gospel today. He assures us that God hears our prayers. He promises that he himself will be present in our midst when we gather in his name.

Prayer is the first act of love — the first help that we can offer to those in our lives. Whether we are praying *with* people, or praying *for* them — prayer is essential.

One practical resolution that we can make: let's try to find a few minutes every day to pray together in our families, to talk to our Lord and listen for his voice. Maybe just part of the Rosary in the evening before bed.

Let's ask Mary, our Blessed Mother, the Queen of the Family, to help us in the week ahead — to love and take care of one another, to become more interested and involved in the lives of others; and to keep in mind that we need to support one another in our prayer life.

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<sup>i</sup> Readings: Ezek. 33:7–9; Ps. 95:1–2, 6–9; Rom. 13:8–10; Matt. 18:15–20.

<sup>ii</sup> 1 Cor. 12:25–26.

<sup>iii</sup> *Catechism*, 1444–1445.