

Homily Notes, 23rd Ordinary A Sept 10, 2017

Readings: Ez 33:7-9; Rom 13: 8-10; Mt 18: 15-20

Knowing the Sacred Scriptures so that we can correct and accept correction in love.

1. Mutual Correction: Today's readings are about both correcting our brothers and sisters and receiving that correction ourselves. We need to do this for two reasons: personal salvation and the spiritual welfare of the community. It is important for us to call to account, to correct each other, and to receive correction as necessary.

2. The most important issues are those which jeopardize our salvation, serious sins. We must also be particularly concerned about inhuman behavior against defenseless people, like child abuse, elder abuse or spouse abuse and violations of basic principles of justice. We need to be ready to take appropriate action to protect the victims. Perhaps the most difficult obligation of watchful love is fraternal correction.

3. The first reading (Ezekiel 33:7-9, cf Ez 3:17-21): Leaders must warn of danger. If the watchman announces the danger, the people can be protected. If he doesn't warn, their blood will be on his hands. This defines the role of an Old Testament prophet. God tells Ezekiel that he is to be a "*watchman for the house of Israel*," obliged to warn Israel of moral dangers. If Ezekiel should refrain from speaking God's word intended to convert the wicked, God will hold Ezekiel responsible for the death (sins) of the wicked. This warning applies to everyone in the Christian community, but especially to those who are commissioned to teach, especially bishops, priests, deacons, catechists and parents. If the "prophet" does not sound the warning, then the blood of the lost is on his/her hands. St Paul knew this clearly and refers to it in his address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20: 17-35 (26-27)(See also Acts 13:46, 18:6). Warning can be kindness. Story of Sinkhole.

4. The blessings of good warning: At the beginning of his ministry Ezekiel was given by God the scroll of lamentation, and wailing and woe, but when he ate it, it was sweet as honey (Ez 2:9-3:4). How so? Why would this be? Is it not true that we must face what is difficult in order to bring life?

5. This raises the question of "What kind of preaching or teaching do you desire?" How willing are we to have God's truth preached to correct our way rather than hearing a "comfortable" gospel? What do you expect of your priests and deacons? Story of Father Schier.

6. In the Psalm we are warned that if we hear the Word of the Lord we should not harden our hearts but heed what he says for our salvation.

7. In the second reading, St. Paul points out that **the love we should have for one another should be our reason for admonishing the sinner.** J. Escrivá says,

"Charity, which is like a generous overflowing of justice, demands first of all the fulfilment of one's duty. The way to start is to be just; the next step is to do what is most equitable...; but in order to love, great refinement is required, and much thoughtfulness, and respect, and kindness".

Any mutual correction must be carried out in this context of love.

8. In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches that true Christian charity obliges a Christian to correct an erring brother. Jesus sets forth into a four-step procedure for disciplining members in the Church: individual, small group, formal church, and excommunication.

9. Why do we need to be concerned about mutual correction? Because we care for each other's salvation and the health of the Church community. In today's Gospel, Jesus instructs his disciples about relationships among members of the church. Suppose a son or daughter, friend or acquaintance, relative, neighbor, even parent or teacher, does "*something wrong*," whether the sin is of commission or omission. By outlining a four-step process of correction, Jesus tells us how to mend a broken relationship within the Christian fellowship. (For judgment within the Community see 1 Cor 5:1-13. For the use of Scripture in such correction see 2 Tim 3:14 – 4:5). If the erring brother refuses this correction it may mean in certain cases contacting the Promoter of Justice in the Diocese (Fr. Gavin Vaverik (903-266-2159). Is it not true that we must face what is difficult in order to bring life? Illustration of difficulty of actually doing, story of co-worker.

10. Why is there controversy over being our brother's/sister's keeper? Modern believers have become so individualized that they tend to think that they have no right nor responsibility to intervene in the private lives of their fellow believers; so they pay no heed to the serious obligation of encouraging an erring brother or sister to give up his or her sinful ways. Today many think that whatever each person thinks is right for him or her.

11. Others evade the issue saying, “As a sinner, I don’t have the moral courage or the right to correct someone else.” But Jesus emphatically affirms that we are our brothers' keepers, and we have the serious obligation to correct one who has injured us or others in order to help our neighbors retain their Christian faith and practice **using guidelines and standards set forth by God and His Church.** Have we offered advice and encouragement to our friends and neighbors and coworkers when it was needed, and loving correction in private where that was possible?

12. God promises blessings if we carry out this responsibility of mutual correction. See James 5:19:

“My brothers, if anyone among you should stray from the truth and someone bring him back, he should know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”

Or in the words of Ezekiel, when he ate the scroll of lamentation and wailing and woe, it was as sweet as honey (Ezek 2:9-3:4).

13. Further reflections:

1. Mt 7:1-5 is not a prohibition against all judgment. It is a warning against hypocritical judgment.

There is a basic misunderstanding about judgment that we need to put to rest. The first verse says,

“Stop judging, that you may not be judged.”

Too many people think this prohibits judging others without reading the rest.

“For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you. Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye? ... You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother’s eye.”

This is a warning against hypocritical judgment. The passage really says to judge with mercy and truth.

There are two kinds of judgment. The **first** is the judgment of the action. Is it good or bad? Is it a problem for their salvation? To judge in this way is both kind and necessary. The **second** kind of judgment is judging their eternal salvation; that they are going to heaven or hell. This we cannot judge. Only God knows. The passage from Ezekiel requires that we exercise the first kind of judgment. But there are difficulties.

2. 1 Cor 5:9-13 – We are to judge (evaluate, discern, and correct) our brothers and sisters in the faith.

“I wrote you in my letter to associate with immoral (fornicators) people, not at all referring to the immoral of this world or the greedy and robbers or idolaters; for you would then have to leave the world. But I now write to you not to associate with anyone named a brother, if he is immoral, greedy, and idolater, a slanderer, a drunkard, or a robber, not even to eat with such a person. For why should I be judging outsiders? Is it not your business to judge those within? God will judge those outside. “Purge the evil person from your midst.”

3. Gal 6:1-5 is an important warning against severe judgment, calling for gentle correction and a warning not to fall into the same sin one is correcting. This is a common danger.

“Brothers, even if a person is caught in some transgression, you who are spiritual should correct that one in a gentle spirit, looking to yourself, so that you also may not be tempted.”

4. Eph 6:1-4 is important with children in the family.

“Children, obey your parents (in the Lord), for this is right. Honor your father and other. This is the first commandment with a promise, “that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life on earth.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord.”

5. Lk 17:3 – rebuke when necessary, forgive if the person repents.

If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he wrongs you seven times in one day and returns to you seven times saying, ‘I am sorry,’ you should forgive him.”

14. Warning: Mutual correction is a difficult action to accomplish in the right spirit. We need to be prayerful. We need to be gentle. We need to understand clearly what it is that has happened? It is easy to be too severe or too judgmental. Note what immediately precedes this in the Gospel reading today: the parable of the lost sheep. A basic suggestion: always start gently, without accusation, asking to clarify. Make sure that what you think happened actually happened. In certain areas it is helpful to obtain professional or advanced information first.

Application

1. What might be a situation in which you might be called on to correct someone? How would be best?
2. Illustration of how a grandmother approached her husband for happiness in 50+ of marriage.

1. What might be a situation in which you should call the Promoter of Justice? We have the Promoter of

Stewardship Reflection: Use of money and possessions is a training ground for more important things.

See Luke 16:10-13. If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth, who will trust you with true wealth? If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours?"

A good guideline is giving 5% of our income to the church and 5% to other godly causes. This would mean giving the value of the first 2 of your 40 hours of work to the Church in the offering.

Funny Illustrations

1: A pastor preached a wonderful sermon, saying we should love our enemies. And, when he got through he asked, "Is there anybody in the audience who can truthfully say that he or she has no enemies?" An old gentleman got up right underneath the pulpit, and he said, "Father, I ain't got no enemies." So the Pastor tells the congregation, "Let's listen. This man has the secret. He can teach us something. Go ahead, sir, now tell us how we do that." "Oh," he said, "it ain't hard. You see, I've outlived all those rascals."

2) Grandma's list: There was the grandmother celebrating her golden wedding anniversary who told the secret of her long and happy marriage. "On my wedding day, I decided to make a list of ten of my husband's faults which, for the sake of the marriage, I would overlook." A guest asked the woman what some of the faults she had chosen to overlook were. The grandmother replied, "To tell you the truth, I never did get around to making that list. But whenever my husband did something that made me hopping mad, I would say to myself, "Lucky for him that's one of the ten."

3) Or would you be more like the woman who was bitten by a rabid dog, and it looked as if she was going to die from rabies. The doctor told her to put her final affairs in order. So the woman took pen and paper, and began writing furiously. In fact she wrote and wrote and wrote. Finally the doctor said, "That sure is a long will you're making." She snorted, "Will, nothing! I'm making a list of all the people I'm going to bite!"

4) One New Year's Eve at London's Garrick Club, British dramatist Frederick Lonsdale was asked by Seymour Hicks to reconcile with a fellow member. The two had quarreled in the past and never restored their friendship. "You must," Hicks said to Lonsdale. "It is very unkind to be unfriendly at such a time. Go over now and wish him a happy New Year." So Lonsdale crossed the room and spoke to his enemy. "I wish you a happy New Year," he said, "but only one."