

## Homily

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Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time - September 6, 2020

EZ 33:7-9 - PS 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9 - ROM 13:8-10 - MT 18:15-20

St. Paul calls to mind Jesus' two great commandments of love and tells us to: "*Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.*" St. Augustine puts it even more simply: "**Love** ... *and do whatever you want.*" And this **love** is to be extended to all.

Jesus commands us to Love our neighbor ... and ... loving our neighbors is easy ... when they are the same race as we are ... when they speak our language ... worship as we do ... vote as we do. Loving neighbors who are mirror images of ourselves is a commandment we can all embrace with ease. But Jesus erases the barriers and boundaries **we** create and invites us to embrace **Him** ... in the person next door ... the stranger ... the panhandler ... those we have yet to meet.

But "wait!", we say. The world is a dangerous place, and this approach seems terribly naive. But **only** ... when we see the image of our loving Lord in others ... will we be able to see the face of a neighbor in the faces of those we meet. And this we **must** do because love is **not** a suggestion. It is a **command!**

And no ... the love that Our Lord demands of us is not always easy ... especially when those we must love treat us badly! Then we must remember what Our Lord said when He taught us how to pray. We are to: **forgive ... as we wish to be forgiven.** No love is **not** always easy! And today Jesus teaches us ... perhaps the **most** difficult duty that love demands. He emphasizes one of God's earliest lessons ... taught way back in Genesis: Yes ... we **are** ... our brother's keeper! He teaches us that: If a loved one ... a neighbor ... a brother or sister ... is living a lifestyle that is imperiling his immortal soul we have the **obligation** ... to try to bring him back into harmony with Christ and His Church.

But this is calling for the thing that **most** of us dread ... and would walk **miles** ... to **avoid** ... **confrontation!** And we live in a culture that asks: "who are **we** ... to correct another? Are **we** perfect? What gives **us** the right to judge? We should just mind our own business ... be civil ... agree to disagree ... live and let live ... just be tolerant". But this is the wisdom of our culture ... not of God ... and is it born out of **love** ... or ... just a lack of courage? If we really care for a person, we must have the courage and the love to intervene when a loved one's soul is in danger ... when his or her eternal life is in peril.

If we are in doubt about this ... we must look to the example our Savior set for us. Yes ... He was kind and merciful ... **but** ... He was certainly not **tolerant** ... as our culture uses the term. Last week, we heard Him

call Peter "**Satan**" rebuking him for thinking not as God does but as human beings do. He corrected James and John when they were seeking the higher seats in His kingdom. He certainly got the attention of the moneychangers in the temple. And never did He say to the Scribes or the Pharisees that we must "agree to disagree." **No!** ... He corrected them calling them "hypocrites" ... "blind guides" ... "whitewashed sepulchers," ... a "brood of vipers". Why did Our Lord confront these people? Because Jesus had come to **save** ... the money changers ... the Scribes and the Pharisees ... and Peter, James and John; and to do that, he had to first let them know the error of their ways.

As Christians we all recognize our obligation to assist our brothers and sisters who are homeless ... hungry ... or need clothing. But we also have to have the courage to risk his or her displeasure if a brother's or sister's soul is in danger and they need our help. This ... Jesus tells us we **must** do if we are to be His followers. In our first reading the Lord puts it even more bluntly to Ezekiel: "If ... you do **not** speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way, the wicked shall die for his guilt, but I will hold **you** responsible for his death."

Jesus tells us that, first, we must **privately** approach the sinner so we will not publicly humiliate him or her. If the sinner sincerely repents and returns to live in harmony with Christ ... we must thank God and maintain that privacy. If the sinner remains indifferent to his salvation, we must meet again with two or three witnesses and, finally, we are commanded to tell the church.

We must never forget that at the heart of Jesus' concern is the spiritual welfare of the sinner. This must also be our concern. The easy and worldly response that it is: "It's none of my business" is merely another way of saying I'm not my brother's keeper. And we must never forget that we do not confront the offender to demonstrate our own moral superiority or to shame the individual but rather to correct the individual and bring about returning the brother or sister to harmony with Christ and His Church in as gracious and inconspicuous a manner as possible.

We all make up a community of sinners trying to become saints and we all veer off the path from time to time. And ... when **we** need the loving correction Jesus commands today ... and when someone corrects **us** ... we must remember that is for our good and is given out of love.