

# 23<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR A - 2020

Ezekiel 33:7-9    Romans 13:8-10    Matthew 18:15-20

*Reflection*

*Fr Tao Pham*

## SCRIPTURE NOTE:

**First Reading (Ezek 33:7-9).** This contains a message for the prophet himself, reminding him of his pastoral responsibilities. God has posted him as a sentinel on the city wall. It is his duty to bring back others from infidelity and iniquity. It is presumed that he speaks to those under his care with genuine humility and love for them. The responsibility to point out to a wrongdoer the error of his ways and to try to get him to reform is the link with the Gospel.

**Gospel (Mt 18:15-20).** This talks about the duty of a Christian has to correct an erring brother or sister. It is presumed that the fault in question is serious, but has not necessarily been committed against oneself. Every effort must be made to bring the erring person to repentance: first in private, then before a few, finally before the whole community. If he is still unrepentant, he must be excommunicated. The decision of the Church will be honoured by God, since God inspired them in making that decision. This passage presents difficulties. The procedure Matthew outlines here implies a fully developed and organised Church with a system of ecclesiastical discipline. What is more, it speaks of tax collectors and Gentiles as irredeemable outsiders. The harsh epithets reflect a tradition cultivated by the stringent Jewish Christianity out of which Matthew's Church grew. The biggest problem, however, is that it doesn't sound like Jesus. No doubt it went back to something Jesus did say. At its widest what Jesus was saying was: if someone sins, no effort must be spared to get him to acknowledge his fault and reform. While each member of the community has the responsibility to correct an erring brother or sister, special responsibility falls on the leaders. They are the 'sentries' posted by God to watch over the community.

**Second Reading (Rom 13:8-10).** Seven of the Ten Commandments refer to relations with our neighbour. All seven are summed up in the one command "Love your neighbour as yourself", because if we really loved our neighbour, we would not harm him in any way.

## REFLECTION:

Dear sisters and brothers, one of the most difficult things in life is correcting another person. Yes, there are people who seem always to be correcting others—but that type of person rarely has any lasting success. What the Lord God wants from us is to find ways

to draw others to HIM, the Lord God, by the way of correction. That is a divine task. We Christians have a responsibility to others. That is the theme of this weekend's readings. Our readings this weekend list there different kinds of responsibilities we have to others. The responsibility to speak, to respect and to heal.

First, we have a responsibility to speak. The prophet Ezekiel speaks of the role of the watchman to warn of danger. The Prophet Ezekiel was told by the Lord to correct others—and he did not want to do it. God told him bluntly: 'if you do not tell others their faults, then you are responsible for their deaths.' This is really strong language—and yet so needed today. None of us wants to tell others their faults or that what they are doing is against what God asks us to do! We have a moral duty to speak the truth about right and wrong, whether to our society or to individuals. There are different ways of doing it but as Christians can we be silent when there are attacks on innocent life, when our society is going in the wrong moral direction, when people we know are damaging themselves? The Lord says through Ezekiel that we have the duty to speak. To say nothing is to become morally complicit in the wrong another does, like watching someone damage another's car brakes. If we speak and that person refuses to listen, we will have done our duty. We have the responsibility to speak the truth to another.

Then the second duty is to respect another. St. Paul lists in his Letter to the Romans the duties of love: do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not covet. We can state them in a positive way. We have the responsibility to respect another's life, respect another's marriage, respect another's property and respect another's integrity.

Finally, the Gospel reading goes a bit deeper into our responsibility in dealing with conflict. We can call it the Lord's teaching about conflict resolution or conflict management. Here is the case: What do you do if someone does something wrong to you? How is the Christian to handle it?

The Gospel talks about the responsibility to correct an erring brother or sister. Jesus says, 'If your brother or sister does something wrong, go and have it out with him or her.' It is presumed that the fault in question is serious, but has not necessarily been committed against oneself. If someone is doing serious wrong, we have a duty to point it out to him or her. This duty falls most heavily on the leaders in the community (see First Reading). But it is the duty of every Christian. However, it's something that calls for courage, sensitivity, and above all love.

The passage we have in the Gospel today is all about how to deal with a neighbor who has wronged us. But we can also look at this from the other side where we are the one wronging someone else. It works both ways. The challenge is: how to bring about reconciliation with a deep awareness of the truth of the situation. All of us must learn that we offend others at times, that we misjudge others at times, that we take advantage of others at times. If we can come to recognize our own brokenness and lack of love

towards others, then we will find it much easier to deal with the brokenness and lack of love in others.

***The Lord gives us several following steps.***

The first step is to put our complaint into words. Too often, we keep it inside, keep it bottled up and go into a slow burn. If someone does something wrong to us, we pretend to overlook it but we really don't. It goes deep inside, building up pressure until sooner or later there's a Mt. St Helen's type explosion. If someone does wrong, bring it out into the open, state it and face it.

The Lord says further that, the second step we should keep it private. So often, what we do in a conflict is speak to everyone about it except to the person involved. We gossip, slander, complain, engage in detraction rather than confront the person who needs to know.

Thirdly, if the person does not listen to us, says the Lord, the third step we should use a mediator, a third person to help with the resolution. Sometimes a third person can be a bridge between two people at odds with each other.

Fourthly, if the individual refuses to listen to the mediator, then the Lord says, we should use the fourth step is to refer to the Church. Today, we could apply this as taking a personal injury to the official body which has a right to know. This is especially true today in cases of abuse and domestic violence. There are times when we need to bring in the authorities.

Finally, if the individual will not listen to them, says the Lord, we should then use the fifth step is to pray for him or her but leave them to God's justice, God's judgment and God's grace.

Dear sisters and brothers, we have a responsibility to others. And as Christians we have a responsibility to not stand by and watch others destroy themselves. We show that responsibility by speaking the truth to them like Ezekiel does in the first reading. We show that responsibility by respecting another's life, marriage, property and integrity like St Paul tells us through the Letter to the Romans in the second reading. We show that responsibility by seeking to manage conflict in a Christian way.

The point of this weekend's readings is that Christian life is not a feeling or an emotion but a responsibility. The greatest harm we can do to people when they face spiritual danger is to do nothing and just look the other way. Every Christian community experiences difficulties in one form or another. Misunderstanding occur, divisions arise. This weekend's Gospel reminds us that Christ is present in our communities even when they are broken, when only two or three meet in his name. Healing occurs when we seek

to embody in our communities the qualities of Christ, especially forgiveness and mutual love.

We have duty to correct another. But we must not commit a sin while doing so. We must not humiliate the person we are reproofing. And we must not do it in anger, because in that case all we do is cause the person to harden his heart. We must do it out of concern for the other person. It is a way of showing love for him. We don't show love for someone if we allow him or her to go on doing wrong. We are responsible for one another. We should not remain silent when silence can be taken to mean that we approve of what is happening. In that case we bear part of the responsibility for the evil. God is continually calling us from the error of our ways into a closer relationship with him and with one another.

Dear sisters and brothers, Jesus came not to condemn us but to save us. In order to be saved, we have to confess our sins. But this is seldom easy. Pride makes it difficult for us to confess. However, if we do confess our sins, we have nothing to fear but the mercy of God. Amen.

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### ***Dear the Fathers in our Parishes,***

*Many Australians observe Father's Day on the first Sunday of September. It is a day for people to show their appreciation for fathers and father figures. Father figures may include stepfathers, fathers-in-law, guardians (eg. Foster parents), and family friends. Father's Day is not a public holiday. It falls on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and most businesses follow regular Sunday opening hours in Australia.*

*Dear the Fathers, if coronavirus pandemic doesn't happen and we don't have to quarantine the entire state and curfew time like it is now, there's nothing to stop the way of celebrating Father's Day in our churches at this weekend. We just go to church for Mass and then we congratulate all the Fathers in our Parishes and ask God bless them all. However, coronavirus pandemic has turned all our normal activities upside down: due to this pandemic, everything was different we cannot do anything.*

*Due to the Coronavirus pandemic and we are in the hard lockdown and the curfew rules, we cannot gather physically in our churches to celebrate Father's Day in our churches this year. Instead, on behalf of Fr Steven and Fr Lenin, I would like to send this message to you with prayers, blessings and best wishes.*

*On this occasion, I would like to take this opportunity to remember all of you: Fathers, Stepfathers, Fathers-in-law, Guardians (eg. Foster parents), and family friends of Sacred*

*Heart and St Thomas the Apostle Parishes, by sending you my greetings with prayers, blessings and best wishes.*

***I wish you have a very happy, joyous and meaningful Father's Day at home with your loved ones in your family!***

***God, our heavenly Father, bless all the Fathers in our Parishes, that they may find strength as fathers. Let the example of their faith and love shine forth. Grant that we, their sons and daughters, may honor them always with a spirit of profound respect.***

***Heavenly Father, you entrusted your Son Jesus, the child of Mary, to the care of Joseph, an earthly father. Bless all fathers in our Parishes as they care for their families. Give them strength and wisdom, tenderness and patience; support them in the work they have to do, protecting those who look to them, as we look to you for love and salvation, through Jesus Christ our rock and defender. Amen.***

*Best wishes!*

***Fr Tao Pham***