

23rd Sunday (A)

- Jesus says, *'If your brother/sister does something wrong, go & have it out with them alone'*; he doesn't say, *'Put up with it, or suffer it, or endure it.'*
- He says, *'Go & confront the person with their wrong-doing.'*
- If someone is doing us a wrong, we have a duty to point it out to him or her.
- It's a special duty/responsibility for those in positions of authority (1st Reading).
- People often put up with all kinds of abuse for the sake of a false peace.
- It can be very difficult when we feel that someone has hurt us to actually go & speak to them about how we are feeling.
- It is so much easier to revel in our hurt, or seek payback for the hurt.
- Sometimes we feel that we might ruin a friendship by speaking to our friend about a way in which they have hurt us; but a hurt that goes unaddressed will continue to hurt & will probably be repeated maybe unconsciously.
- Or, when one person feels offended or hurt by another, it seems the last thing they do is to go and speak to the person, confront them with the hurt and try to resolve it.
- Soap operas and TV sitcoms promote avoidance of issues.
- The sub-text of so many TV shows is about lying to cover up a mistake; or seeking revenge for some perceived (usually incorrect) insult; or working through others to try to deal with some hurt.
- If characters on these TV shows were to confront one another with a perceived hurt and seek to resolve the difference between them, then there would be no 'drama' to play out in the show.
- Admittedly, it doesn't make for great television, but it does make for much better relationships!
- This week's gospel reminds us of the need to challenge our friends or others close to us when they hurt us, but it also reminds us that when we have hurt others **we** need to be challenged about it & called to account for **our** actions.
- There is an art in confronting a person in a positive way.
- If we adopt a harsh approach with someone, all we do is cause them to harden their hearts & make them resent us.
- In that case, not only is nothing achieved, but further harm is done; whereas if we adopt a gentler approach, we may soften their hearts, help them to see the error of their ways, & so we can enable them & free them to change.
- In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994), Nelson Mandela describes his long years of imprisonment on Robben Island.
- He tells how one day he was called to the main office.
- General Steyn was visiting the island & wanted to know from Mandela if the prisoners had any complaints. Badenhorst, the officer in command on the island, was also present. Badenhorst was feared & hated by the prisoners.
- In a calm, but forceful & truthful manner, Mandela informed the visitor about the chief complaints of the prisoners, but he did so without bitterness or recriminations.

- The general duly took note of what he had to say, which amounted to a damning indictment of Badenhorst's regime.
- The following day Badenhorst went to Mandela & said, *'I'm leaving the island. I just want to wish you people good luck.'* - the remark left Mandela dumbfounded.
- Later he said, *'I was amazed - He spoke these words like a human being, & showed a side of himself we had never seen before'*; He wrote: *"I thanked him for his good wishes, & wished him luck in his own endeavours."*
- Mandela says that he thought about this incident for a long time afterwards.
- Badenhorst had been the most callous & barbaric commanding officer they had had on the island, but that incident revealed that there was another side to his nature, a side that had been obscured but that still existed.
- And Mandela concludes, *"It was a useful reminder that all people, even the most seemingly cold-blooded, have a core of decency, & that if their hearts are touched, they are capable of changing. Ultimately, Badenhorst was not evil; his inhumanity had been foisted upon him by an inhuman system. He behaved like a brute because he was rewarded for brutish behaviour."*
- To confront another person is a difficult thing & calls for courage & wisdom.
- If we do it in anger & in a vengeful frame of mind, in all probability it will be counter-productive.
- We have to do it not just out of concern for ourselves & the hurt caused to our pride, but out of concern for the other person.
- It is a way of showing love for them. (See Second Reading from Romans)
- We don't show love for someone if we allow them to do wrong to us.
- By hurting us they are also damaging themselves.
- It is in their interest too that they desist from what they are doing.
- Besides, to watch someone doing wrong, & not try to stop them, is to bear part of the responsibility for the wrong they are doing- we can be complicit in their wrongdoing.
- The duty to speak out falls most heavily on the leaders in the community, but we should all consider ourselves responsible for one another - it is the duty of all who call themselves Christian - we shouldn't remain silent when silence can be taken to mean that we approve of what's happening - in that case we share responsibility for the evil.
- If we confront the offenders in the right spirit, & they are genuine, they will want to put it right; if not, they won't be able to plead ignorance, saying, *'Why didn't you tell me?'*
- The object is not to score a victory over the other, but to win them over, to be reconciled with them; to speak to them not out of arrogance, but out of a genuine humility & care for them.
- God continually calls us from the error of our ways into a closer relationship with him & with one another.