

Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time A2017

The readings of this Sunday talk about accountability and fraternal correction. They show that we are all responsible for one another's salvation or perdition. They invite us to love our fellowmen as ourselves in order to deserve God's salvation.

The first reading describes the mission of the prophet Ezekiel. It shows that God chose him to be a watchman over Israel and his mouth in the midst of his fellowmen. It also shows that his mission was that of warning his compatriots so that they turn away from sin. It equally highlights the prophet's responsibility and that of his listeners.

What is behind this text is the idea that a prophet is like an ambassador acting on behalf of God. There is also the idea of a shared responsibility in the salvation and the perdition of our fellowmen. The last idea is relative to the personal accountability that each one bears with regard to his salvation or his perdition.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus talks about fraternal correction. The Gospel starts with Jesus' speech in which he gives four situations of conflict and the appropriate solution to each one of them. First of all, there is the situation in which a brother sins against another. The solution in such a case would be the dialogue on one-on-one. The second situation would be the case of the failure of the first solution. In such a case, the solution would be the involvement of one or two more people so that the matter might be settled on the testimony of more than one person. The third situation would be that of the failure of the second solution. In that case, the matter can be brought before the whole church. The fourth situation is that of the failure of the third solution. In such extreme case, the solution would be the treatment of the sinner as a pagan or a tax collector.

After that, the Gospel refers to the principle of unanimity that Jesus states by saying that whatever his disciples bind on earth is bound in heaven and whatever they loose on earth is loosed in heaven. The Gospel ends with Jesus giving the assurance of his presence by saying that where two or three are gathered in his name, he is present.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about the necessity of fraternal correction. Let me start with two observations from sociology. First, the sociologists define Humans as social animals. What they mean by it is that human beings live in community and interact continually with one another. Second, Humans are different from one another so that their ways of being, thinking or acting differ from one another.

If people live together but are different from one another, it means that a possibility of conflict between them is inevitable. Hence, the question: if conflicts appear between them, how shall they handle them? What can they do in case of harm or hurt to one of the members of the community?

For Jesus, four approaches are possible. The first is the one-on-one process in which the individuals try to find a solution to their conflict by talking to each other. The second approach consists in involving one or two other people who can help resolve the matter. The third approach consists in involving the whole Church to tackle the issue in case the two first processes have failed. The last is the rejection of the sinner.

From Jesus' proposal, let us assume two things, namely that people hurt each other and for that reason, the correction is necessary. Second, the possibility of conflict raises the

question of the way to resolve it. And it is here that the problem becomes complicated, because we are not sure if our way of resolving the conflict can hurt people's feelings or cause more damage than we thought.

There is no ideal solution. However, I believe that whatever might be the process envisaged, we should agree on some principles. The first principle is that of accountability. We are all accountable for the bad things we do. We are also accountable for the salvation and the perdition of our fellows. Nobody can see a fellow sinning without warning him. If he does not do so, he bears some responsibility before God and his conscience.

That is why God tells Ezekiel that he is a watchman for the house of Israel. This role belongs to each one of us. We have to help each other for the sake of our eternal salvation. To argue that it is not my problem is just an expression of selfishness and indifference that has no room in Christian ethics.

The second principle is that of humility. This principle presupposes the acceptance of the wrong done, for the sinner, and the awareness from the corrector that he is not God who is there in order to pronounce a judgment. After all, we are all human beings and inclined to sin. For that reason, we have to be compassionate and humble about the faults of others. We should not forget that today it is about them, perhaps, tomorrow it might be about us. That is why it is important to always put ourselves in the shoes of others and feel what condemnation means.

The third principle is that of right manner. Any correction must be done lovingly and wisely. That is why it is important to think about the way of doing it, the timing of doing it, the place from which we do it and the content of what is brought in the correction. We have always to ask ourselves if we correct like a friend and a fellow sinner or like an enemy. We have to ask ourselves if our correction is intended to heal or to do more harm. We have always to remember that love wins over better than a quantity of condemnation.

The fourth principle is that of right prayer. To condemn people for their wrong doing or to talk about them behind their back is very easy. However, we do not correct them because we criticize them. That is why I always think that it is better to pray for people and their conversion of heart when we see them sinning than to simply criticize them. We have always to remember that there is no more efficient action than a sincere prayer before the Lord. Prayer is a silent, but efficient action before God. If prayer is done in the spirit of Jesus with humility, sincerity and surrendering to God's will, it obtains the result for which it has been presented to God. Such prayer finds its foundation in the perpetual presence in our midst of our Lord Jesus according to the promise he has given us. Let us pray that God may help us accept fraternal correction from one another. May he help us understand that we are watchmen for one another! May God bless you all!

Ezekiel 33: 7-9; Romans 13: 8-10, 21b-22, 27; Matthew 18: 15- 20

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