

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2020

Following the readings of this Sunday, I want to talk to you about the task of caring for one another. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. First, as members of our society, we live together and with one another. Although we are differently gifted and variously skilled, we remain, however, together.

Whatever might be the opinion some might have about others, and vice versa, none can escape the fact of living together. By living together, there are duties and obligations we have to fulfill toward another. No one can renounce these duties and obligations without being a bad citizen.

Second, what is true for the civil society is also true for the church. As the members of the Church, we have duties and obligations that we have to fulfill toward one another. Those duties and obligations are the object of today's readings. Let see all that in detail.

In the first reading, the prophet Ezekiel talks about the commission received from God to be a watchman to the house of Israel. He has the task of warning the sons of Israel to remain in the paths of God. He is the first to realize how badly things are going and warns his brothers. If he warns the wicked, but the latter does not change his conduct, the wicked shall die for his guilt. However, if he fails to dissuade the wicked to abandon his sinful ways, the latter will certainly die, but the prophet will be responsible for his death.

Now, let us apply this text to our context. Like the prophet Ezekiel, God has made us each others' keepers. We have the duty to help each other to persevere in the ways of God. We have to support, advise and pray for each other. When we fail to fulfill this duty, we are responsible for the perdition of our fellows.

Sometimes, we are afraid to tell the truth to people until they are hurt for having gone too far in the wrong direction. Why do we let so many people drink themselves into trouble and never tell them? By doing so, we bear the responsibility of their guilt because we knew that what they were doing was bad, but did not warn them or help them to abandon their conduct.

The prophet Ezekiel reminds that the salvation is surely individual, but it cannot be achieved without the help of others. We have to help each other for the sake of our eternal salvation. To argue that the problem of my neighbor is not my problem is just an expression of selfishness and indifference that has no room in Christian ethics. That is why by highlighting the individual responsibility of the sinner, we cannot lessen our accountability before God and one's conscience.

In the Gospel, Jesus formulates the duty of caring for one other under the reality of conflicts between brothers. In this narrative, proposes a four way approach to the resolution of conflicts. The first approach consists in settling the matter on a one-on-one process, where 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 last 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.

In order make these approaches work, we need to take into account some principles. First, there is the principle 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 we do not do so, we bear some responsibility before God and our conscience. We are each others' keepers.

Second, there is the principle 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, as such, we are 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, but tomorrow, it might be about us. That is why it is important to put ourselves in the shoes of people and feel what condemnation means.

Third, there is the principle 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 and the content of what it is brought to correct the fellow. 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.

Fourth, there is the principle of right prayer. To condemn people for their wrong doings 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 rather 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 set a goal this week of asking forgiveness to those we have hurt. 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; Matthew 18: 15-20



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