

## Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time A2023

I want to start this homily with an anecdote. A couple of years ago I read a story of a Jewish woman who was separated from her children and family by the Nazi during the Second World War. After the War, she learned that her whole family, including her children, was exterminated in the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

For sure, as it can happen in such circumstances, she was very sad and angry. Many of the Jews who were in the same situation, spent much of their time hunting the perpetrators of the Holocaust to punish them, basically seeking revenge or, as they learned from their Hebrew Scripture, to apply the principle of “an eye for an eye”, “a tooth for a tooth.”

Curiously that lady did not join the group of those seeking revenge. Instead she dedicated her life to the task of reconciliation and forgiveness. With her violin, she traveled throughout European cities, from Germany to Ireland, giving concerts and spreading the message of forgiveness. She would often say: “If a Jewish mother can forgive what happened, then why can you not forgive your differences and be reconciled to one another?”

Though she was a Jewish, this woman had the spirit of our Lord as he preaches forgiveness and reconciliation in the Gospel. When the disciples of our Lord realized that he was going up the mountain alone to pray, they asked him to teach them how to pray. He told them, when you pray say: “Father, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” Our Lord himself gave us an example when he was on the cross: “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing.”

That Jewish lady did not call revenge on the Nazi. Our Lord Jesus did not call revenge on his enemies. As I am saying this, I am reminded of the ordeal Immaculée went through during the genocide in Rwanda. She, too, listened to Jesus and it is that message of forgiveness, reconciliation and peace, she is sharing with us today.

We, who listen to such a message, what shall we do in similar situations? Above everything else, we have to pray. We pray that God will perhaps work a miracle and bring about the peace that for us seems impossible. We pray that before all else there be peace in our own hearts and that, with the help of God, we do what we can to spread that peace and reconciliation around us. St. Paul tells us, “Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another.” As difficult as this task may seem, it is this love that makes it all possible because it is the very love of God that exists within each one of us that we are told to share with everyone.

In a couple of minutes, we will say to one another, “The peace of Christ be with you.” Let us mean it seriously and sincerely, not just for the person standing next to us, but for all people. Let us do what we can to bring about peace and reconciliation. “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.”

In today’s reading, especially the prophet Ezekiel and the Gospel, reconciliation is put in terms of fraternal correction. If someone has done you wrong, our Lord tells us, go and reconcile with that person, and again, this is more easily said than done. To remain in the spirit of our Lord requires of us a lot of discernment so that we do the right thing. If

not, we will take our feelings and emotions for the truth. Sometimes we think others are wrong simply because we do not agree with them. And yet, that is not necessarily true.

Moreover, the correction our Lord is talking about is not only active, but also passive. There is not only the duty to correct but the duty to allow ourselves to be corrected. Many people like the wrong they have done to be forgotten, but they never see the necessity to apologize or ask forgiveness. And it is precisely here that we can see whether someone is mature enough to accept the correction or not. Whoever wants to correct someone must be ready, in turn, to be corrected.

Our Lord puts also the whole question of reconciliation in the context of the Church. The unity and solidarity that have to characterize the disciples cannot exist if there is dissension and division. And we know well that dissension and division exist among us. We all have a responsibility to do what we can to mend that division and to bring about reconciliation.

Reconciliation and healing are the primary reasons why our Lord came into our world, why he became one of us. Therefore, the work of salvation is above that of reconciliation and healing. And in doing what we can to heal the wounds of sin and division we join in the mission of our Lord himself, a mission he handed on to his disciples, and all of us, his Church, members of his body.

Brothers and sisters, we gather every Sunday around the table of the Lord to be strengthened by the Eucharist for the task of reconciliation. We go from this place to work with the Spirit to renew the face of the earth. This means confronting whatever keeps us from being a community, whether in the Church or in the world outside us. Where there is racism or sexism we must confront them and work to eliminate them. Where there is economic injustice we must speak out against it and work to eliminate it.

“Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another,” St Paul says. As difficult as this task may seem, it is this love that makes it all possible, because it is the very love of God that exists within each one of us. We have to love one another with the very same love with which God loves us, and that is why St Paul says, “The one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” The question facing all of us is this: what do we do to show our love, because that is how we join the task of our Lord to heal the wounds of sin and division?

Once again our solidarity inside the church gives us responsibilities toward one another. We are all the watchmen for our brothers and sisters. We cannot look at them perishing without doing anything. It is up to each one of us to decide how we will attend to our brothers and sisters in trouble. This is part of that debt of love St Paul talks about and that we all owe to one another. This is part of the task of watchman Ezekiel is talking about. Let us stand up and do it for the love of God and of our brothers and sisters!

(Adapted from the homily of Fr Leo Murray, S.J., 2014).

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



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