

**“We are each other’s keeper” Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A (Ezekiel 33:7-9, Romans 13:8-10, Matthew 18:15-20)**

Brothers and Sisters, on this twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time, the readings remind us that we are responsible for each other and that we must take good steps in correcting and forgiving one another. Usually when someone hurts us, we naturally react by retaliating. But the readings of today teach us how to reconcile with each other and settle conflicts in the church. In our first reading, the prophet Ezekiel is described as a watchman appointed by God to correct the Israelites when they do wrong. The work of the watchman is to stay alert and warn the people of the coming of danger. God tells Ezekiel, “If you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, his blood I will require at your hand.”

Today’s responsorial psalm encourages us to hear God’s voice and not harden our hearts especially when his Word corrects or warns us. It says, “O that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your hearts.” St. Paul in the second reading presents love as a rule that must guide us when correcting one another. Most people do not like being corrected and they are embarrassed when corrected, that is why when we correct others, we must do so with love. St. Paul says the only debt we owe each other is the debt of mutual love. He says love seeks the good of the person who is loved.

In today’s gospel from Matthew, Jesus suggests three steps on how to correct someone who has moved from the right path. First, Jesus says you must go to the person and give a private correction. If this fails, then secondly bring two or three

witnesses to also correct the person. If this also fails, then thirdly, Jesus says bring it to the church for the church to advise the person. Jesus says if all these three steps fail, the church must regard the sinner as a “gentile or a tax collector,” that is excommunicated. God approves the community’s decision. That is why Jesus says, “whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” So, the sins we forgive on earth are forgiven in heaven.

Today, Jesus is inviting us to be each other’s keeper reaching out to fallen and spiritually weak members of the church. The good news is that in many instances we may not have to go beyond the first step of correcting one on one. If you personally approach a person who has sinned against you to correct him politely, the person will be happy to come back without resisting you. The reason is that there are some people who may not realise they have hurt others. So, if you feel offended by someone’s words or actions, you could politely tell the person rather than telling people.

Finally, Jesus tells us in today’s gospel that coming together to pray is important. “I say to you, that if on earth two of you agree in asking for anything, it will be granted to you by my heavenly Father; for where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matt 18:20). We can be each other’s keeper when we pray together. Coming together in Jesus’ name helps those who are weak, strengthens their prayer life and restore them back into full communion with the community. May Jesus reconcile us with one another as we meet as a community to pray. **Amen.**

**By Fr. Emmanuel Subaar**

