

OT XXIII (A), Homily, September 06, 2020

Ezekiel 33: 7-9; Psalm 95 (O that today you would listen to the voice of the Lord.
Do not harden your hearts!); Romans 13: 8-10; Matthew 18: 15-20.

The common theme of today's readings is God's command concerning our spiritual responsibility and individual accountability for others in our families, parishes and community. This accountability arises from our identity as God's children. As brothers and sisters in Christ, then, we become each other's "keepers," and take on a painful, triple responsibility. We must lovingly and prudently correct each other when we err, forgive those who offend us, and ask forgiveness from those we have offended.

In the first reading, God tells Ezekiel that he is to be a "watchman for the house of Israel," obliged to warn Israel of moral dangers. If Ezekiel should refrain from speaking God's word given to convert the wicked, God will hold Ezekiel responsible for the death of the wicked.

In the second reading, St. Paul points out that the love we should have for one another should be our only reason for admonishing and correcting the sinner. Love seeks the good of the one who is loved. Therefore, we should admonish one another so that we all may repent and grow in holiness.

In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches that true Christian charity obliges a Christian, not only to assist his neighbors in their temporal and spiritual needs with material help and prayer, but also to aid with correction those brothers and sisters who have damaged the community by public sin.

If the erring one refuses a one-on-one, loving correction by the offended party, then the Christian is to try to involve more people: first, "one or two others," and eventually "the Church." Finally, Jesus mentions the efficacy of community prayer in solving such problems, for Christ is present in the praying Christian community.

Messages: 1) We are our brother's/sister's keeper. Modern believers tend to think that they have no right to intervene in the private lives of their fellow believers. Others evade the issue saying, "As a sinner, I don't have the moral courage or the right to correct anyone." But Jesus emphatically affirms that we are our brothers' keepers, and we have the serious obligation to correct others. We need to offer advice and encouragement to our friends, neighbors, and coworkers when it is needed, and loving correction, in private, for a personal offense where that is possible.

Today, Jesus makes it clear how important we are, one to another. One in Christ, our community can draw on God's power to make His healing, life-giving love, more effective among His people.