

A Reflection on the Gospel for the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,



This is a good Sunday to talk about a delicate problem: How to correct others who go astray. Jesus speaks about fraternal correction in today's Gospel. And in the first reading the prophet Ezekiel says that he has been "appointed as watchman for the house of Israel." He has the thankless task of trying to "dissuade the wicked from his wicked way."

We live in a society dominated by gossip. Rumors can spread rapidly and bring down even the most powerful people. Not that we recently invented gossip. Six centuries before Christ, the psalmist asked God to protect him from "accusing tongues."

When Ezekiel says he was appointed as a watchman, he did not say God gave him a license to gossip. The key word is appointed. He had a specific God-given office. There are people today who have likewise been appointed. There is no great mystery about who they are. Parents have been appointed as watchmen for their children, teachers for their students, a doctor for his patients, a pastor for his parish family, etc. Each has been given the delicate office of guiding and sometimes correcting the ones they are responsible for.

The office of watchman is then entirely other than gossip. It involves hard work, willingness to suffer and the desire to build. Jesus lays down a common sense approach in today's Gospel. "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him." (Mt. 18:15) That alone is enough to make one ask, "Is this something I really want to confront?" Maybe this time it's better to just forgive and forget it. Notice that the New Testament speaks hundreds of times about forgiveness, but only a few times on fraternal correction. That is about the proportion we should follow. Most of the time we are called to simply forgive as God forgives us. But if prayer and reflection convinces you that something more than forgiveness is required, you must be prepared to go all the way. Jesus makes that clear, and he outlines the steps. Get the testimony of two or three others. If that does not work, go to the church. That means going to the proper authority, the pastor, bishop, not some discussion group.



Our modern culture employs gossip and the threat of litigation to undermine and ultimately to destroy. Jesus' way is the exact opposite: forgiveness and a clear process of **reconciliation**. Its goal is to build and to save. Brothers and sisters, the choice is yours.

Have a Blessed Week!

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