

“Brothers and sisters: Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” Words from the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. Paul’s letter to the Romans – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

Love will take different forms, depending upon the circumstances. Love is faithful to its commitments, and it respects the commitments of others, so adultery or any other form of sexual infidelity is out of the question. Love holds life in high regard; it overcomes anger and revenge and so it cannot entertain any thought of killing. Love respects the property of others, and so it will not condone stealing or dishonesty of any kind. Love honors the rights of other people and so it does not entertain thoughts of covetousness or jealousy. St. Paul singles out only four commandments, but he insists that love covers all other commandments as well. When one truly loves another, one desires only what is good for them. This is precisely what Paul is saying here. Love is the fulfillment of the law. It’s easier said than done though. We know that we don’t always love as we should. A given of the human condition is that people will inevitably offend and hurt each other.

Whenever this happens, we have a responsibility to find ways to be reconciled with those who have become estranged, especially in our parish, in our families, in our workplaces, and in our schools. Our readings today reveal for us that it is our job to safeguard our relationships rather than let them languish. How do we see ourselves in the role of Watchman, Reconciler, and Peacemaker? How do we act in that capacity? Are we better at establishing relationships or maintaining them? How many of us make an effort to go to the sacrament of Reconciliation? Indeed, it is God himself who leads us in the way of reconciliation. Although humanity has turned away from God, God has restored us to right relationship with the Father, through the saving mystery of his Son’s great love for us in his life, death, and resurrection. Just so, the Spirit today prompts us Christians to take up our cross and follow Christ’s example in bringing about reconciliation and restoring harmony in our personal relationships. Just as love is the fulfillment of the law, so too is love the fulfillment of the work of reconciliation. Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. We often hear these words of St. Paul at weddings, but isn’t it incredible how much these words of love apply to the process of reconciliation as well!

Again, it is easier said than done. For example, we don’t like to admit that we are in the wrong, let alone think that we could be wrong. Instead of truly apologizing, many times our efforts at reconciliation come across more so as a justification for our actions or we end up making excuses for ourselves. And yet, if the first thing we owed them was our love, then I imagine that our apologies would be much more sincere and we would try harder to make things right. At the same time, we don’t like to confront those who have wronged us. In our

hurt, we judge their intentions or end up angrily insulting them for their mistakes. If we are afraid to confront them directly, we complain about them to everyone else behind their backs, or we'll embarrass them publicly on social media in an attempt to get our due. All of these things only make matters worse for the relationship. It's ironic that after being so vindictive towards them and their behavior, we still expect them to be our friends. And yet, if the first thing we owed them was our love, then I imagine that we would be better at turning the other cheek and trying to understand them. Whether we are the ones at fault or not, every step of reconciliation requires courage and a desire for unity before all else. In short, it requires love.

The process for reconciliation outlined in our Gospel today starts with each person going to each other directly, individually. It is this step that is hardest of all, and all too often it is bypassed in favor of running up the chain of command to solve our interpersonal problems. In the midst of the unrest gripping our country, we need to do a better job on that personal level of things. So, I would like to pass along today a communication skill that can help us be more loving when we approach each other with a need for reconciliation. This skill is called an "I-message." Quite simply an "I-message" goes like this: I feel \_\_\_ when \_\_\_ because \_\_\_. I feel ignored when you don't call me because I value your friendship. Doesn't that carry an entirely different tone than: "You don't care about our friendship" or "You need to start calling me more often" or "How much do you call up your other friends"? When we accuse others or send solutions or avoid those things which concern us, we are putting up roadblocks to communication. The "I-message" skill on the other hand, minimizes the risk of confrontation because I talk about myself and my feelings and not about the other person, which can make them defensive. I feel sad when some individuals do not wear masks in our adoration chapel because this fact – they've told me so – has turned away several vulnerable people from otherwise coming to the Lord in prayer, which is the very mission of the Church, and that makes me sad. I feel betrayed and defeated in this because the honor system we entrusted to our people is being abused and it's impossible for me to police this 24/7. I feel guilty when mentioning this at large, because most are following the rules, and now I don't know what to do or how to respond to the people who left our parish. Talking about myself in this way with "I-Messages" subtly opens the door to a response and actually invites the other person to talk about himself or herself. It's not always easy to say I'm scared or puzzled because we all like to look good in the eyes of others. It takes a lot of patience and practice. But if we can talk to and love each other in this way, at this interpersonal level, then reconciliation can happen.

The community and its members have a great power to bind and to loose on earth, and indeed whatever grievances are bound here will likewise be bound in heaven. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never fails. If we can do that with one another, and make the movement towards reconciliation in love, we can unite heaven and earth. Christ will be in our midst. "Brothers and sisters: Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."

# Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 127

## Reading 1

**EZ 33:7-9**

Thus says the LORD:

You, son of man, I have appointed watchman for the house of Israel; when you hear me say anything, you shall warn them for me.

If I tell the wicked, “O wicked one, you shall surely die, ” and you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way, the wicked shall die for his guilt, but I will hold you responsible for his death.

But if you warn the wicked, trying to turn him from his way, and he refuses to turn from his way, he shall die for his guilt, but you shall save yourself.

## Responsorial Psalm

**PS 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9**

**R. (8) If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;  
let us acclaim the rock of our salvation.

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

**R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

Come, let us bow down in worship;  
let us kneel before the LORD who made us.

For he is our God,  
and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.

**R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

Oh, that today you would hear his voice:

“Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,  
as in the day of Massah in the desert,  
Where your fathers tempted me;  
they tested me though they had seen my works.”

**R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

## Reading 2

**ROM 13:8-10**

Brothers and sisters:

Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another;  
for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.  
The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery;  
you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet, ”  
and whatever other commandment there may be,  
are summed up in this saying, namely,  
“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”  
Love does no evil to the neighbor;  
hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.

**Alleluia**

**2 COR 5:19**

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ  
and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

**Gospel**

**MT 18:15-20**

Jesus said to his disciples:

“If your brother sins against you,  
go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.  
If he listens to you, you have won over your brother.  
If he does not listen,  
take one or two others along with you,  
so that ‘every fact may be established  
on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’  
If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church.  
If he refuses to listen even to the church,  
then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.  
Amen, I say to you,  
whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,  
and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.  
Again, amen, I say to you,  
if two of you agree on earth  
about anything for which they are to pray,  
it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father.  
For where two or three are gathered together in my name,  
there am I in the midst of them.”

