

Twenty-third Sunday of the Year - Cycle A
St. Francis of Assisi Parish – Belchertown, Massachusetts
September 2-3, 2017

Scripture Readings: Ezekiel 33:7-9 ✧ Romans 13:8-10 ✧ Matthew 18:15-20

In May of 1915 shocking news spread throughout the United States that a passenger ship called the *Lusitania* had been torpedoed. This event played a major role in getting the United States involved in the First World War.

Thirty years later, however, the truth came out. The *Lusitania* was carrying munitions and officials of the United States government knew it. The fact was deliberately concealed to gain support for America's entrance into the war.

One hero stood out in that situation. It was Senator Robert La Follette from Wisconsin. The senator publicly stated that the ship was carrying munitions and that the president knew it. The senate threatened to expel La Follette for his comments. In his defense, La Follette asked that an inventory of the ship's cargo be made public. His request was denied. A man by the name of Dudley Field Malone, a New York Customs officer, quietly offered to testify on La Follette's behalf and reveal the cargo of the *Lusitania*. When the Senate heard of this, all charges against La Follette were dropped.

Senator La Follette was one of only a handful of public officials who refused to go along with a lie that led to the killing and maiming of millions of people.

This story illustrates a point that each of our readings today touch upon. Namely, that there comes a time when we must speak out against evil, when we must confront those who are involved in wrongdoing, when we cannot remain silent in the face of evil.

And we must do this even at the risk of personal rejection. That is part of the price of being a follower of Jesus.

While we are called upon to speak the truth, we must be careful in our judgment of others. Our calling for truth and justice must come from a heart full of love, not hate. It must come from a mind that seeks what is right and not one that seeks simply to *be* right. It must come from a spirit of compassion and not a spirit of self-righteousness.

Speaking out also needs to be handled tactfully and delicately. There is truth to the old adage that it isn't what you do; it's the way you do it that gets the result. For example, there's a mother who always holds her child's hand or places her arm around her child when she corrects her. The words get through because the action and the tone tell her that her mother loves her.

It's good to remember that the reward for speaking out often comes long after the confrontation. What we say most often starts or adds to a process of change rather than to some instant transformation. Change is a difficult thing, even when the suggestion for that change comes from a good and loving person.

Let us pray to God for the strength to speak out that which we know to be truth, let us pray for a loving and compassionate heart so that our words and actions may be effective and let us pray for the humility to know that we, too, need to be shown the way from time to time. ✧