

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 6, 2020 A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Loving God, you created us for a relationship with you. When we stray from you, you call us back. When our brothers and sisters begin to follow a sinful lifestyle, you call us to help them see their erring ways. Give us the wisdom and courage to help each other to follow your ways. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: All three readings speak about the importance of right relationships and personal responsibility. The first and third readings address the issue of how to respond to someone in our church family who is walking a wrong and sinful path. In the second reading, Paul tells us that in following the way of love, we fulfill the law.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: EZEKIEL 33:7-9

These verses contain a message for the prophet himself and for his pastoral responsibilities towards his own people now living in exile in Babylon. Ezechiel compares his role to that of a *sentinel*. A sentinel standing on top of a city wall would alert the people about any approaching danger.

Once the *sentinel* sounds a warning, the responsibility for action lies in the hands of the people. In a similar way, the prophet's task is to warn the sinner of the impending disaster resulting from sin. Once the prophet speaks a word of warning, it is up to the sinner to listen to the word and act. If the prophet fails to issue the warning, he will be held responsible for the disaster that will befall the sinner.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 95

The message imparted in the first and third reading: *"If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts,"* echoes the call to conversion.

SECOND READING: Romans 13:8-10

As noted last week, Chapters 12-13 are often called the 'moral section' of Paul's long letter. In this reading, Paul speaks to us about the centrality of love when it comes to following Christ, and living a normal life. Christian love must be sincere, without hypocrisy, and must manifest itself in heartfelt affection for one's

brothers and sisters in the community—even for one's enemies—and anyone in need. In the context of today's readings, it can also be noted that genuine love sometimes calls us to reach out to an erring brother or sister with the purpose of drawing him/her back into God's ways.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matt. 18:15-20

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Matthew 18:15-20

In this Gospel, Jesus outlines for his disciples what one must do if a brother in the community sins against him. He gives three steps:

- The first step is to reach out to the brother, state the offense, and allow the brother to privately repent of the wrong he has done. Notice in the first step that one is *not* to go to others to complain about the offender.

- If that does not work, the offended person should take one or two other members (ideally guys who are 6 feet tall ☺) of the community to help in a reconciliation effort.
- If the second step does not work, the offender should be brought before the whole community. If he continues to be unrepentant, “treat him as you would a Gentile or tax collector,” i.e., as someone who has a disdain for the Gospel. Some scholars say that Matthew is telling his audience to excommunicate the unrepentant sinner. Others think that Jesus wants us to treat the sinner with unconditional love because that is how he treated Gentiles and tax collectors. Jesus is saying that if someone sins, no effort must be spared to bring about the reform of the sinner and keep him in the community. Jesus further says when the community or even two or three members of the community prays about this issue, their decision will be affirmed in heaven.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse or image in the readings caught your attention or drew you in. Was there a verse or aspect of the readings that challenged you?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. Have you ever tried to intervene in the life of another adult who was on a destructive path or was about to make a decision that you believed would have destructive consequences? If so, how was that experience for you?

3. When someone hurts us, we have three options.
- Go to the offender, as today’s Gospel tells us.
 - Complain about the offender to someone else.
 - Keep the hurt inside and do nothing about it.

Which option are you most likely to follow? Why?

4. If you have grown in your ability to confront another, what has helped you grow in this way?

5. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestions: If you need to confront someone about something, consider doing it. First pray and ask for the right words to say. Be loving yet direct in your approach and avoid words that are condemnatory. If someone you know is clearly on the wrong path, pray for the courage to confront that person.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, reconciling life’s hurts is one of the toughest parts of your teaching. Help me to grow in this area, to develop my ability and willingness to bring healing to a broken or wounded relationship. Amen.*

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for the grace to grow in your ability to confront and deal with wrongdoing in yourself or others.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Lord Jesus,
during your time on earth,
you found yourself in several sticky situations.
You modeled for us the power to speak up
when we should.
But sometimes it may be better not to speak.
May your Holy Spirit be with us to help us to know
when to speak up and when to be quiet.
Mother Mary, un-doer of knots, pray for us.
Amen.*