

Bible Study

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle A

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) Lord our God, you are the source of all wisdom. Help us to hear your guiding, encouraging voice in the words we read today. May our reflections lead us to know you better and to love you more, so that we see every situation through your eyes. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Re-connecting Question

1. Where did you feel or see God acting in your life this week?
2. How do you typically react to being wronged by someone?

Commentary before the First Reading: Ezekiel 33:7-9

Ezekiel was a priest in the temple at Jerusalem who, after being taken into exile with many other Jews from the area by the Babylonians in 597 BC, was called by God to be a prophet, a sort of spiritual “watchman.” In war time, the watchman was a person who stood on the city walls and surveyed the surrounding countryside for any sign of the enemy. If he spotted anything disturbing, he sounded a horn and everyone quickly got inside the city walls for safety. Failing to sound the alarm in a timely fashion was to bear responsibility for any resulting death.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. Do you get the impression that the Jews in exile were not very good at keeping the Commandments? Why?
2. Does the prophet have a choice to warn the sinner or not to warn him/her?
3. What is the difference between the person described in verse 8 and a person who is a sort of self-appointed moral judge of others’ behavior?
4. What is the prophet’s reward for proclaiming God’s word?
5. Last week we heard Jeremiah saying that the word of God burned inside him so much that he could not resist proclaiming it. How does the urgency described in this passage compare to that one, in your opinion?

Commentary before the Second Reading: Romans 13:8-10

Sometimes we Christians act as if loving God and neighbor was a new teaching from Jesus. Both directives were quotations from the first books of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Torah, namely Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5. This is not the love of passionate emotions; this is the love that is a conviction, serving as a foundation for all of one’s actions. To love is act in a way that benefits another.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. Does it seem like an exaggeration to say that loving others fulfills the entire law of God?
2. St. Paul lists 5 of the 10 Commandments in the middle sentence. Take each one individually and explain how love fulfills the directive of each of those commandments.
3. Is charity (that is, love) an obligation, a responsibility, a worthy ideal, or a license to do whatever we want as long as we do it with love for someone?
4. Is there anyone, then, that we do not have to love?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Matthew 18:15-20

This week’s theme of relationships with others continues in the Gospel reading from Matthew. The 3 steps that Jesus outlined were the normal way that disputes were settled in his day. The word “church” here does not mean “the universal community of God,” but rather to the local community of believers, emphasizing how we need to support each other on the road to holiness, for every sin affects those around us. We heard verse 18 just 2 weeks ago, but now it takes on a broader meaning.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Is there a word or phrase in this reading stands out for you?
2. The word “brother” in this reading refers to a fellow believer, not to a sibling. Is Jesus saying that we have a duty to point out each other’s faults, or is he talking more about maintaining healthy relationships overall? Prove your point.
3. What is the connection between love and confronting someone who has acted badly?
4. In practical terms, what would it have meant at that time to be treated as a Gentile or a tax collector?
5. Which verse connects prayer with reconciliation? What is the connection?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. Can you share about a time when you had to correct someone for doing wrong? How did it end?
2. What does it mean to you personally to know that God would rather reconcile a sinner than punish?
3. Does that tell us anything about how we ought to relate to each other?
4. In what ways are you a watchman (or a “watchwoman”)? In other words, how do you try to live up to your responsibility to be your “brother’s (and sister’s) keeper”?
5. To “pray in Jesus’ name” meant to ask God for a favor that Jesus Himself would ask for. Can we ask for anything, then, as long as we end with “...in Jesus’ name. Amen.”? What happens if we do?
6. After reflecting on these readings, do you feel that God would like you to handle it differently when someone treats you badly?

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, your love for us is greater than we can comprehend. You even died a torturous death on a cross for us rather than allow us to languish in hell, in total absence of your presence, because of our sins. You are as merciful as you are just. Teach us to be likewise merciful toward one another and to love with no limits. We ask this in your name, for you are God with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.” (Sign of the Cross)