

## 23<sup>rd</sup> Ordinary Sunday

An employee in a Government office in India was fired because his boss complained that he was sleeping during the office hours. He went to his boss and said, "Sir, why did you complain about my sleeping in the office hours. Don't you know that you and most of the staff sleep during the office hours?" His boss told him rather politely, "Yes I know that I and many of the staff nap during the office hours. But you are disturbing our sleep by snoring." Many times in our life we correct, admonish and judge the actions of our brothers and sisters around us. The readings today tell us that the correction and admonition should be done out of love for the one who needed correction. The correction should be intended to save the other person but not to punish him or her.

Being a member of the Church means we belong to the single Body of Christ and form a community of brothers and sisters in Christ. We are, therefore, the "keepers" of our brothers and sisters, for each one of us is important to all the others in our Faith community. That is why we have to be meaningfully present to, and take responsibility for, other people. This individual responsibility in a Christian society includes, as today's readings remind us, our responsibility for each other. Perhaps the most painful obligations of watchful love are fraternal correction and generosity in forgiving and forgetting injuries.

In the first reading, God tells Ezekiel that he is to be a "*watchman for the house of Israel.*" Like a watchman, the prophet exists only for the good of others. He is to give them God's words, to challenge them and to correct them from time to time, so that if they should go wrong, the responsibility would be theirs. As Christians, we are all God's prophets, God's representatives, God's watchmen, set on elevated places to give warning of approaching danger to our brothers and sisters. The prophets of all times have a grave responsibility for their people's salvation. None of us can retire from the task of being watchmen. As Ezekiel is appointed watchman over the house of Israel in today's first Reading, so Jesus in the Gospel today establishes His disciples as guardians of the new Israel of God, the Church (see Galatians 6:16). They have the power to bind and loose, to

forgive sins and to reconcile sinners in His name (see John 20:21-23). (Scott Hann).

St. Paul points out that the love we should have for one another should be our only reason for correcting the sinner. Love seeks the good of others. Therefore, we should admonish one another so that we all may repent and grow in holiness.

In today's Gospel, Jesus instructed his disciples about relationships among members of the Church, because through Baptism we assume a serious responsibility for our fellow-believers. Jesus teaches that true Christian charity compels a Christian not only to assist his neighbors in their temporal and spiritual needs but also with correction and counsel. If the erring brother refuses a one-on-one loving correction by the offended party, then the Christian is to try to involve more people: first, "*one or two others*," and eventually "*the church*." But harsh words and an aggressive attitude have no place in a Christian community. Finally, Jesus mentions the efficacy of community prayer in solving such problems, for Christ is present in the praying Christian community. The whole thrust of the passage is that we should all work towards reconciliation rather than punishment.

Many times we tend to think that we have no right to intervene in the private lives of our fellow believers. Others evade the issue saying, "As a sinner, I don't have the moral courage or the right to correct anyone." But Jesus affirms that we are our brothers' keepers, and we have the serious obligation to correct others. Have we offered advice and encouragement to our friends and neighbors and coworkers when it was needed, and loving correction in private for a personal offense where that was possible?

Today's Gospel reminds us of the good we can do together, and of how we can do it. Jesus says, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." If any group of us gather, work, and act with the Holy Spirit guiding us, we will become much more than simply the sum of our numbers. We come to Church every Sunday to form a community of prayer. None of us can form a community alone. We need each other to

form this community. We come and pray as a community. We pray to God to bind us together into the community of love.

We need each other, and we need Jesus. And we have each other. And we have Jesus. We are the Body of Christ. We are the Church.