

SUNDAY 23 (A) (2020)

A) FIRST READING: EZEKIEL

- I am sure many of us have had the experience of being asked to do a job which is difficult or unpleasant
- we might say to ourselves, "Why on earth couldn't they have asked somebody else?"
- that's exactly what happened to the prophet Ezekiel in today's First Reading:
- God says to him, "Son of man, I have appointed you as sentry to the House of Israel."
- How Ezekiel's heart must have sunk when he heard those words.
- He is to be a sentry, or a moral guardian, for the people of Israel.
- It was his job to confront them when they were going astray
- God goes on to say, "When you hear a word from my mouth, warn them in my name." Great!
- He may be told to call a wicked person to repentance.
- That's a hard enough job, but then God warns Ezekiel that if he fails to do so, then he, the prophet, will be held accountable
- So there is no escape for him.

B) WE TOO HAVE TO CORRECT

- And, in a way, there is no escape for us either
- Many of us find ourselves in the position of having to guide and train, and encourage and correct:
- Parents bringing up their children, teachers in school, those involved in seminary training, the directors of novices, religious leaders, anyone involved in leading and guiding a community of people will be faced with the question: how do you correct in a positive and Christian way?
- One of the questions that I am sure parents face constantly is to find the balance between objective standards on the one hand, and on the other, what the child is able to understand and to achieve
- In a loving family, parents will be concerned not so much with the keeping of rules for their own sake, as with the ultimate good of the child
- What will best help that person to learn and to grow?

C) GOSPEL: STEP 1

- In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of the duty of the ordinary Christian to tackle a brother or sister who has gone astray
- The key word here is Reconciliation.
- And what follows is a whole scheme of action, which was probably well-established in the Christian community, when Matthew was writing his Gospel.
- perhaps we can learn from it

- The first step is to approach the person on our own, to speak to them privately. And to be prepared to listen
- That way we don't brood about it, we can clarify whatever is on our mind, and very often the whole matter can be resolved at this stage.
- Sorting something out face-to-face is usually far better than putting things in writing, or email, which can lead to misreading and misinterpretation.

D) STEPS 2 & 3

- If a private and personal meeting fails to achieve the desired result, then we should take one or two wise companions with us.
- But they also must act in the name of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- They too must be positively and generously motivated, not out of anger or annoyance, not out of a desire to get even, but with that ultimate purpose of seeking reconciliation.
- It is only when this second attempt fails that the community is informed and the authorities brought in to decide whether the offender should or should not belong to that community, and on what conditions.
- Jesus says, "if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a pagan or a tax-collector"
- but what does Jesus mean here?
- does he mean that this person should be treated as an outcast?
- or does he mean that they should be treated as Jesus himself would have treated them?
- Jesus went out of his way to seek the tax-collectors and sinners, and even people who weren't Jews at all
- So here too, it isn't a matter of rejecting someone completely, but rather the opposite
- treating them as someone who has a special need to hear the Good News.
- Someone for whom we need to make patient and persevering efforts

E) CONCLUSION

- The Gospel passage ends with Jesus' words, "Where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them."
- So if we feel bound to correct a person, on our own or with others, it must all be part of prayer in action.
- we should pray beforehand for the light of truth, for courage of heart,
- and for the tactful gentleness which will heal rather than wound, win back rather than alienate, and fan the flames of hope rather than bitterness.
- Not easy!

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