

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 6, 2020 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 33:7-9

Thus says the LORD: You, son of man, I have appointed watchman for the house of Israel; when you hear me say anything, you shall warn them for me. If I tell the wicked, "O wicked one, you shall surely die," and you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way, the wicked shall die for his guilt, but I will hold you responsible for his death. But if you warn the wicked, trying to turn him from his way, and he refuses to turn from his way, he shall die for his guilt, but you shall save yourself.

Psalm: Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

R. (8) If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;
let us acclaim the rock of our salvation.
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the LORD who made us.
For he is our God,
and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Oh, that today you would hear his voice:
"Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as in the day of Massah in the desert,
Where your fathers tempted me;
they tested me though they had seen my works."

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Scripture Reading: Romans 13:8-10

Brothers and sisters: Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.

Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus said to his disciples: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that 'every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

What happens when someone misbehaves and hurts you? What should you do, punch 'em out? No. Jesus lays out a detailed plan in the Gospel about how to help a person, especially in the Christian community, who has done you harm. This strategy applies to whatever the damage was: saying unfair things behind your back, embarrassing you in public, stealing, unfaithfulness, you name it. First, go to the person and let her or him know that you believe you have been hurt by what they did or said. This is not an opportunity to “let my anger out,” to get my rights, or worse, to hurt them in return. It is an attempt to repair the relationship, no matter whose fault it was. It is an effort to help, not hurt. Of course, in Sunday's story, Jesus is presuming that there is a basis of love between you and the other person. Another way to say it is that you are both members of the church. What if going to the person does not succeed? Jesus says you should next take two or three witnesses along. They will back you up if your interpretation of the problem is correct. If the person still does not listen, keep trying, he says. Tell the church. Continue to work on it until the matter is smoothed out. Let truth and forgiveness rule.

The underlying reason behind this whole strategy is hinted at in the First Reading. There the Lord says that Ezekiel must speak out to a person when they are doing evil and especially if they have been warned by the Lord. The point is not to punish them, or to turn Ezekiel into a police interrogation unit. The point is to try and help them back from the danger to their own self and to the community. “Frighten the poor sheep back,” the poet Hopkins puts it. You speak out. A personal story: I had a terrible disagreement with a colleague/friend a number of years ago. We were working together on a musical event and it seemed to each of us that the other had done something unforgivable, hurtful and unprofessional. Believe me, I do not know who was right and who was wrong. But we spoke about it one-on-one and gradually came back into each other's good graces. We remained very good friends. Still. The same thing happened a number of summers later. I was the one who “blew up” because of the wrongs I absolutely knew were being done to me. I even sent a peeved email. My friend sent a scorcher in return! Then we worked together to create the event! We knew instinctively what had happened. “We were both tired and quite stressed out, weren't we,” my friend said. “So we each did our stressed-out thing. But we were both trying to help the performance be wonderful.” As you can guess, we remain great friends. I think this is how it can work when Christians are “all too human” and hurt each other. It is not a matter of who broke the rules. All the rules are summed up in a single saying. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Second Reading). How good it is.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Do we have a shared responsibility for others and the world? Are you a “watchperson” in some way? What strikes you as unjust as you watch? Can you think of new ways of bringing justice and divine love into the lives of those people you love? Into your workplace? Into other places in your life?
2. Which ranks highest: how much you love? How much you do? How smart or powerful you are? According to Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 29-37), who is your neighbor?
3. Can you rely on God to grant your request in some way when you and another person agree to pray about something? Do you trust that promise?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

O God, by whom we are redeemed and receive adoption, look graciously upon your beloved sons and daughters, that those who believe in Christ may receive true freedom and an everlasting inheritance. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

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Prayer to St. Michael

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits, who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen