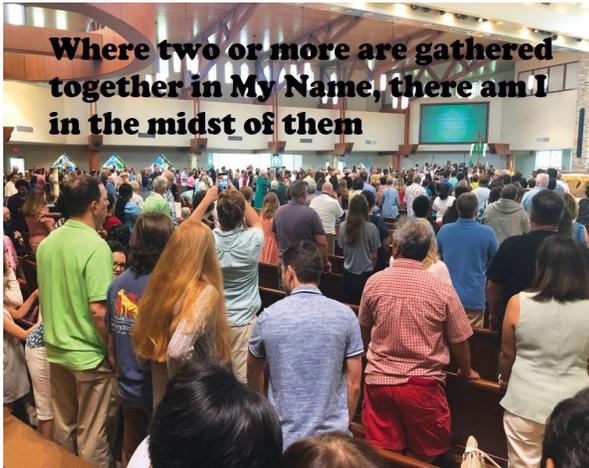


Lectionary-based Faith Sharing

23RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Year A - September 6, 2020



OPENING PRAYER

Leader: *If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts*

All: Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord; let us acclaim the rock of our salvation.

Leader: *Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing psalms to him.*

All: 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.

Leader: *Let us invoke the presence of God:*

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit have instructed the hearts

of the faithful grant that by the same Spirit we may truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

First 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.

Commentary

The activity of the prophet Ezekiel takes place during the exile in Babylon, the most difficult and dramatic moment of the People of God. His book contains oracles and visions intended to strengthen the hope of the Israelite.

The prophet is constituted by God sentinel of his people, that is, it is his turn to be attentive and vigilant to warn people of some danger, in this case of a spiritual nature. It is a mission to make the people react so that they turn away from evil because this kind of behavior will bring negative consequences. According to the text, everyone is responsible for their actions, but whoever has received the prophetic mission from God has the responsibility of warning those who commit evil. If you don't, you become co-responsible for their fate.

The message, although it seems threatening at first glance, (both for the people and for the prophet), is, like the commandments, an expression of God's will that all be saved, which is evident in two verses later (that are not proclaimed in this reading) in which the prophet puts in the mouth of God the following expression: "I do not take pleasure in the death of the wicked, but in their conversion and life"

Reflection

- (1) The word PROPHET means "sent." God sent messengers to his people primarily to denounce sin and injustice. Do you think God stopped sending prophets to the world?
- (2) Do you think that, for example, John Paul II was a prophet? Why?
- (3) Are there prophets only in the Catholic Church?
- (4) When we are baptized we are consecrated as "priests, prophets and kings." What should we do in order to fulfill the prophetic mission that God expects from us?

Second 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.

Commentary

The first 11 chapters of Paul's letter to the Romans is full of doctrinal content. Starting with chapter 12, a change of subject is noticed, as we read a series of advices about the way in which Christians should live their faith.

The passage taken for this reading is very clear and is surprisingly topical, twenty centuries after it was written. Paul has been making references to the Law in the previous chapters, and he takes up the topic to affirm that love is the synthesis of the Law, since everything that it requires is summarized in love of neighbor. Paul shows us that salvation is not based on the fulfillment of the Law, but on faith in Jesus Christ, although the Law is still valid because it fulfills God's purpose of revealing himself and preparation for the coming of the Son.

The commandments are divided into two groups: The first 3 are oriented to love God and the remaining 7 are formulas for practicing love between human persons. And these seven commandments are not to be seen as an authoritative imposition of God to prohibit things, but rather as his desire to protect us, because when, for example, he asks not to lie, not mistreating, not stealing, he is not asking only us, but also to others, which is why we could feel safe and protected because they will not lie to us, they will not mistreat us, they will not rob us ...

Reflection

- (1) Discuss why all the commandments can be summed up in one verb: LOVE
- (2) Do you think that the love in you is superior to your intelligence? What is easier: to love your neighbor or writing a text explaining what love is?
- (3) From childhood we have been taught to "please God" through obedience to the commandments. If instead of having taught us to fear punishment for disobeying the commandments, they had taught us to love our neighbor with sincere love, do you think Christianity would be different? How would we be better?
- (4) Do you think you can teach a way of living Christianity not based on the precepts but on love? How?

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."

Commentary

Let us remember that in this liturgical year (cycle A) we are going through the Gospel according to Matthew. Now, this week and the next one, we will have to review two texts that are part of what some have called "community sermon", one dedicated to fraternal correction and the other to forgiveness.

All of chapter 18 gathers a series of teachings of Jesus that have to do with human relationships, such as consideration and compassion for the weakest, fraternal treatment among all, being open to forgive offenses, etc. They are not about scolding or rules of discipline but rather about what should be the way of behavior of Christians, following, of course, their example.

The specific text for this Sunday, on fraternal correction, seeks to promote an environment favorable to the conversion and salvation of the sinner. Jesus relies on the rules of Leviticus 19:17 and Deuteronomy 19:15 to suggest the steps to follow: First a private conversation, then a warning before one or two witnesses, and once these resources are exhausted, going to the assembly of community. Note that what Jesus proposes is the solution of conflicts and problems, not expulsion (excommunication), that is, it is not a legal response, but a pastoral one. Then the text concludes with an invitation to present a prayer in common to the Father.

Reflection

- (1) We find two promises: When two or more meet in the name of Jesus Christ, he will be present, and When two or more agree to ask the Father, they will be heard. Based on this, how important is community participation to Jesus Christ?
- (2) To what extent is it possible to fulfill Jesus' command to admonish the sinner?
- (3) Discuss the best way to admonish a person who sins so that it provokes his desire for conversion more than rejection for an intrusion into his personal life
- (4) What should be the criteria to measure whether a person is in sin? How can we be sure that we are not judging arbitrarily?

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

All: We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees can propose their own needs of prayer)

All: In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we meet, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*

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