

## **September 10, 2017**

Ez 33:7-9; Rom 13:8-10; Mt 18:15-20

A lot of times, people can do things to us that get us upset. Sometimes these are things are wrongs done to us - you know: someone lies about you, they treat you bad, they betray your trust, they steal from you, they insult or in another way harm you. Other times, we get mad because of something that they did that hurts someone else. In these situations you were not effected, but someone you feel for was done wrong to. We can get upset with someone when they do this - coming out of the love we hold for the person who got wronged - and this causes us to take the offense personally. A final situation are those things that we get mad at someone just for how they act (that is not hurting anyone), or the opinions they hold (that they are not even ramming down our throat), or just things about them like their nationality, race, the friends the hang around with, their family background, or some thing they do that somehow annoys us. Today Jesus is telling us that when one of our brothers and sisters does wrong, we are not just to attack them to put them in their place, or even to pass over it and say nothing. Although letting it go might be the right response sometimes, we should (and often must) make a response to set them straight. But how do we know what response we ought to make?

Ok, let's look at the first situation - the person who does wrong to you. Jesus says in the Gospel: *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.* Jesus is telling us the first level of response to someone who does wrong to you - go and bring it up with them privately. If they don't listen, then bring in others to support the opinion. Give the person a chance to see the error of their ways and make a correction before you get a whole group of people on their back. Bring it to their face first before you spread it around to a bunch of people. Why? Well when we bring in people too quick, when we start to speak about the wrong someone has done to us to others before speaking to them, we can begin the process of getting them judged by others without a chance to speak for themselves. Jesus wants to spare us the tensions created when a misunderstanding between two people gets announced to others and then spreads. How many times do we find out later that there is another side, sometimes we find that the wrongdoer was not who we thought.

I remember a time I addressed a young man at a residential program for something I heard him say that was inappropriate. I addressed him publicly in front of all his peers - only to find a few minutes later that the kid next to him was the one who said it. Sometimes we get it wrong. Sometimes our anger at being wronged leads us to try to form a firing squad for the

person as a first response - Jesus says talk to them privately first. Also important is a little statement Jesus makes: *If he listens to you, you have won over your brother.* The goal is to win him over, to achieve reconciliation - not to beat him down and punish him for misdeeds.

In those other situations when the wrong was done to someone else and we want to jump in (and join the firing squad ourselves) we maybe should encourage a reconciliation between the two people first, rather than trying to join in to take the supposed offender down. In those other situations where the person did not really cause anyone harm, or if our anger and frustration is rooted in prejudice, frustration, hatred, or bigotry - we should be honest with ourself in this and hold back responding until we have got our motives straight. Often we will find out these wrong opinions in ourself by talking to the other (or another wise person) privately.

You may say: "Well maybe it is just best to say nothing. Let the person do what they are going to do. Forget this tedious process of figuring out my motives and correcting them." But this is not what the Lord is calling us to either. We don't grow and neither does the other person. Listen to the first reading: *If ... 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 ... you shall save yourself.* We are not to simply let those who are straying from the way of the Lord and harming us or others to just go their way. We are not to just let the injustices we see happen without making some attempt to intervene - for we will be held responsible when we did not act. If by our efforts we succeed in changing the situation ... then great! If we don't succeed then we have gained the favor of the Lord for working to bring about justice. The offender will bear the responsibility for not hearing.

The whole motive of this is not to punish the wrongdoer ourselves - we can leave the judgement and the punishment to God - the goal is to bring about peace and justice by addressing wrongs and injustices in love. In our second reading we heard: *The commandments ... are summed up in this ... "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no evil to the neighbor.* If we can address the wrongdoer (either who has hurt us, who hurt others, or just bothered us) and do it while loving them at the same time - we will be fulfilling this great commandment. We will approach in a kinder way, and both have a chance to grow. To address the wrongdoer in love - not with the intention of punishment or revenge, but with compassion despite their wrongdoing - this is what God calls us to do. We often have to act so that the wrong stops ... but out of a motive of doing good to the offender - to bring them to a better place, to bring them closer to following the Lord - that is what Christian correction is about. And really ... when we happen to be the offender, isn't that how we would prefer to be treated as well?