



September 6, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

Nobody likes to be corrected. It tweaks our ego, and it is often badly done or consists of someone making snide comments or berating us because we've done something they don't like. Fraternal correction can also sting, but it has the good of the corrected person in mind. Today's readings remind us that correction when done fraternally, it a great act of charity that we should appreciate and practice for the good of others.

In today's 1st reading the Lord reminds Ezekiel, and us, that it is our moral responsibility to warn a brother or sister that they are doing something evil. It's our duty to inform people of the consequences of their evil actions. When the Lord first asked Cain about the murder of Abel, he phrased it in a way that tried to help Cain realize he was responsible for his brother: "Where is Abel your brother?" Cain responded, "*I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?*" (Gn.4:9). We are all our brother's keeper. We live in a world that teaches us to mind our own business, but that doesn't include someone who is drowning, at the mercy of criminals, or committing a crime themselves. Our society is full of initiatives to help others turn from evil: from programs for "at risk" youth to drug rehab to penitentiaries, but none of them has the same power as a brother or sister who genuinely cares and takes an interest in someone on the wrong path. The Lord today is telling Ezekiel today, and us, to inform consciences out of charity, not to force them onto the right path. If we love someone, we cannot leave them in ignorance about the evil they're doing.

In today's 2nd reading St. Paul reminds us that every just law is built on love, and if we focus on loving and teaching others to love everything else will fall into place. Society has many laws and measures today that are built on justice, but not always enforced with love. Deeper than the labels of "suspect," "victim," "criminal," there is only one label that matters: "brother." St. Paul simply repeats what Our Lord himself answered when the scribe asked him which was the greatest commandment: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself". Fraternal correction is not returning evil for evil, no matter what our brother has done.

In today's Gospel Our Lord reminds us that before entering into litigation with someone who has wronged us we should try simple fraternal correction. Our society today tends to try and resolve disputes through rules and regulations, lawyers and courts, fines and penalties. We often try from the beginning to get justice from someone through someone else, when we know that nobody reacts well to being pressured into doing something. We should always try to start by settling a dispute fraternally: one on one, in frank but charitable dialogue. We should not only seek our good, but the good of the person who has afflicted us, and we won't completely understand their motives if we don't speak to them. There are many small disagreements that can be resolved this way and to everyone's satisfaction. If an attempt at fraternal correction fails it is not a lack of charity to bring witnesses in and, if necessary the Church (authorities), to help both parties see the truth and adhere to it. Justice is sought, but the good of both parties as well. If the guilty party does not listen to all the facts and an authoritative judgment, then the guilty party has been shown to not be in communion with those he or she has afflicted, and that has to be acknowledged, sometimes publicly. When the Church formally declares someone to be excommunicated or under interdict it is taking this step for the good of the unrepentant party. There's a false story that has floated around for the last twenty years on the Internet, but, as a joke, it is worth telling to illustrate our point. On a foggy night, a large ship saw a smaller ship on the sea and realized that they were on a collision course. The large ship made radio

contact and asked the other ship to change course slightly. The request was calmly declined. Angry and astonished, the large ship identified itself with all its titles and demanded to be heeded: "This is the U.S.S. BIG NAVAL SHIP, and there will be serious consequences if you don't change course immediately! Over." The response? "This is a lighthouse. Over." The small "ship" was a lighthouse and the U.S.S. BIG NAVAL SHIP, for all its fuming, was headed straight for the rocky coast. Fraternal correction is simply pointing out that someone is on a collision course. They can stay on course if they wish, but it's inadvisable.

May God bless you

Fr. Dan