

From the Homily Library of Fr. Callisutus Iyorembor

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A - September 6, 2020

Fraternal Correction

My dear brothers and sisters, our Gospel passage for this week raises a very practical issue: how to act when someone close to us is treating us bad. Obviously, these kinds of problem occurred even among the First Christian Community. Notice that Jesus does not say put up with it, suffer it silently or endure it. Today's Gospel gives us a way of tackling a problem like this.

First of all, let us take a look at the usual way the injured party goes about solving the problem.

We begin by keeping it to ourselves. It may be that we are ashamed or simply unable to talk about it to anyone. So, we pretend that everything is normal. Meanwhile we brood over the injury. This turns to magnify it. We become angry, bitter and depressed and may cut the offender off as a kind of revenge.

Eventually, unable to keep it to ourselves, we begin to tell others about it. We tell friends, neighbors, co-workers, relatives. We might even put it on social media without naming names. Sometimes total strangers are brought into it. We bring them in, not as advisors, but as people who will agree with our reading of the situation and who will sympathize with us. The last person to hear about the hurt is often the person who is causing it.

Go and tell him/her his fault between you and him alone

Today's Gospel shows that there is another approach. We should confront the person who is causing the hurt. *"If your brother or sister sins against you go and tell him his*

fault between you and him alone." We have a duty and a responsibility to tell them. Failure to do so shows a lack of love for the person. **Confrontation** takes a lot of courage and risk; there is an art in confronting a person. But many times, a little honest talking may clear the air. The person may not be aware of the extent of the hurt he or she may be causing.

We need to ask **God for the wisdom**, to give us the right words, to open up a person's heart to receive what we might be concerned about and what we intend to convey because if we adopt a harsh approach with someone, all we do is cause them to harden their hearts. In that case, not only is nothing achieved, but further harm is done. Whereas if we adopt a gentler approach, we may soften their heart, help them to see their error and so enable them to change and you have won them over.

Confrontation should never be done in anger or annoyance nor should it be done out of our desire to get even. It must be done out of concern for them too, not just out of a desire to appease one's own wounded pride. Also, before we do it, we should examine our own conscience to see if maybe we are not partly to blame.

The highest point we can attain in a confrontation is when we get the other person to see what he had done wrong and to condemn it himself. If he repents, forgiveness must be warm and without limits or conditions.

If he or she refuses to see the light, what then? We should seek advice. We should get one or two people (wise people) and enlist their help to face them. If even then we fail, we should speak to community. Community could mean the Church, or family or some group of concerned, objective and responsible people who are interested in the things of God. The whole aim of the exercise is not to score points against one's brother

or sister but to help them amend their ways and be reconciled and become true Disciples as Christ intends. When reconciliation happens, it leads to greater growth for both parties. Reconciliation is very hard but for that reason it should not be left untried.

Watch how all of this ends; it ends with this famous line of prayer "*where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in their midst.*"

Most importantly, pray for them.

References

New Sunday & Holy Day Liturgies by Flor McCarthy, SDB Year A. (Dominican Publications 42 Parnell Square, Dublin 1)

Bishop Robert Barron, "Homily for 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time" Year A