

Twenty-Sixth Sunday Ordinary B21 September 26, 2021

We have a responsibility to watch out for one another.

That's it. Very simple, right?

But do you agree?

Most religions have at the heart of their moral teaching the understanding that we are to care for one another,

in many cases **putting others first**, even before ourselves.

I think we'd have to agree that Christianity is certainly that way. No doubt about it.

The commands of Jesus and the teachings of the Church through the centuries have made that very clear.

We have to watch out for one another.

It's non-negotiable and **central** to who we are as a family of faith.

It's funny how, in the desire to "watch out" for one another, we sometimes fall into the trap of simply "watching" one another.

And what I mean by that is, we can often become overly preoccupied with how **others** are leading their lives ---

either for good or for bad.

As a result, we often put other people under a microscope, analyzing every little thing they say or do.

So, in the case of something negative, instead of gently helping another see how he or she

might be making a bad choice or might be exhibiting a bad attitude,

we holler and criticize and moralize to such an extent that **we actually have the opposite effect than what we intend.**

Rather than helping someone get back on a healthier path, we push them farther away.

Often we simply resort to gossiping behind their backs, tearing them down little by little.

In those situations, those around us may feel judged and belittled,

rather than loved --- a good indicator that we may be doing something wrong.

On the flip-side we can also become overly preoccupied **with the good we see occurring in and to another.**

And instead of affirming them and being happy for the good things going on in their lives,

we act out of jealousy --- resentful of their good fortune.

The stories we just heard proclaimed in the First Reading and Gospel are examples of this.

In the reading from the Book of Numbers we heard how Joshua was jealous because

two people outside of the camp had received the spirit and were prophesying.

Joshua was pretty upset because they weren't present under the tent when Moses dished out the spirit on seventy of the group.

Likewise, in the Gospel Reading from Mark, John doesn't like it that some were driving out demons in Jesus' name,

because they weren't followers of the Lord.

Yes, in some cases, in subtle ways, we may even try to **undermine the positives which are taking place in their lives.**

Sometimes, when good things happen to others, *we just can't stand it.*

Our over-preoccupation with the lives of others is glaring evidence of something inconsistent in our own spiritual lives.

You guessed it --- when we're too focused on what's going on with those around us,

it usually means **that we're neglecting what's going on in ourselves**, in our own spiritual lives.

That may sound a little bit selfish, and therefore contrary to who we are as Christians.

But this is one area in which we do get to act out of self-interest, or out of love for ourselves if you prefer that language instead.

However, the goal or end or purpose for focusing on ourselves is not our own improvement or praise.

Rather, we look inward **precisely so that we can love God more perfectly**, and in turn,

love his other children more perfectly also.

And the same mistakes we make when looking at the lives of others we can make when examining our own lives --- that is,

sometimes we get overly focused on the bad and other times we spend too much time looking at the good.

When we examine the bad in our lives --- the sin, faults, and weaknesses, one of two things can happen.

Sometimes we can be too hard on ourselves, imagining that **God couldn't possibly love us as he does.**

Or, we can refuse to take ownership of our sins, instead, **rationalizing them away.**

It's amazing all the excuses we can come up with for the things we either do or fail to do.

When we examine the good taking place in our lives, hearts, minds, and souls, we can often get an **inflated and**

distorted view of ourselves --- believing the press we've written about ourselves in our minds.

And when we get a little too proud of the way we live our lives it becomes impossible to see where the true credit lies --- with God.

When that happens, we no longer recognize our blessings and gifts.

Rather, we begin to see our blessings as entitlements and rewards.

Humility becomes a thing of the past, and graciousness a neglected virtue.

Living a reflective life is a good and holy thing, and necessary if we truly want to follow the path God has chosen for us.

Therefore it's good to be watchful --- not towards others so much, but inwardly, into the very core of our being.

Hopefully, if we go about it honestly and sincerely, this sort of self-examination will provide us with great clarity ---

a clarity which will illuminate **where we are, where we're going**, and the **best way to get there**.

Jesus uses some pretty extreme language to get his point across -- **"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. . . . And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out."** You get the picture.

Jesus doesn't paint a pretty one, that's for sure.

But its importance must not be underestimated, or the Lord would probably not have said it in such a strong and unforgettable way.

And so today, before we start paying too much attention to how others are doing spiritually,

let's take a good look inside ourselves.

It's time for us to start minding the store, and make sure everything is in order.

We can't say God didn't warn us! (but God never stops loving us either!).