

During these COVID times, we have been watching out for ourselves and for each other. Although it has caused untold sufferings for huge number of people, it has also the effect of making us more aware of each other's welfare. We are alert to what we can be doing not just to keep ourselves safe but to keep everybody else safe and healthy as well. In our own parish and in parishes throughout the country, we have had to think carefully about how we can allow people to gather for worship safely. A whole new ministry has evolved in the service of watching out for others. The virus has brought home to us that what I do or fail to do has consequences for others. It has made us more aware of our interdependence. We may find wearing a facemask uncomfortable, but we know that it is one of many ways we can help to protect not just ourselves but others. People have been looking out for neighbors who are living alone and confined to their homes.

That value of watching out for each other is very evident in today's readings. In the first reading, the prophet Ezekiel has a sense of the Lord calling him to be a watchman for the people of Israel, to speak in God's name, to correct them from time to time, and warn them about the consequences if they don't listen to God. Ezekiel is not a watchman in that physical sense but he knows the Lord is calling him to be a spiritual and moral watchman for the people of Israel. God wants his people to live in a way that will serve their wellbeing and that of others.

There is something similar going on in the gospel reading. Jesus calls on his disciples to watch out for one another, in the sense of taking some responsibility for the spiritual and moral wellbeing of others in the community of believers, the church. We have to know how one member's bad behavior can easily drag down the whole community. Jesus outlines a certain procedure for dealing with when someone's actions bring negative impact in us or the community. First of all, Jesus recommends a face to face meeting with the offender in which you explain the transgression or problem. If that doesn't work, he recommends an intervention by a number of members of the community. Finally, if that doesn't work, the whole community can come together and decide what to do with the person who will not repent. According to Jesus, all the efforts should be made to make a reconciliation with those who offend us. We must lovingly and prudently correct each other when someone offends us. This is what we pray in the Lord's Prayer "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us". Just as in these COVID times we have become very aware that we are all interdependent when it comes to our physical wellbeing, Jesus is reminding us that we are equally interdependent when it comes to our spiritual and moral wellbeing. The goodness and failings of one member effect the entire group. So, it is our responsibility to help others to live a life of holiness. Our correction is not to point out the faults of others or to blame them or create guilt in them and make us feel better rather it is to make others to realize the negative impact of their actions. In all that we do, we are to be motivated by love that seeks conversion, reconciliation, and growth in holiness rather than by anger or hurt that seeks revenge, punishment, or humiliation. Like Ezekiel we are watchmen, brother's keeper for our neighbors. Our silence will condemn us if we fail to warn them of their harmful

nature. The Lord God gave us the responsibility to be our brothers' keepers. It is not worldly responsibility and accountability but spiritual responsibility and accountability that each and every one of us has towards our neighbors.

Saint Paul had a very strong sense of how interdependent we are within the church, as the body of Christ in which every individual member is dependent on every other member. He speaks of the great commandment of love of neighbor. All the commandments are about relationship. The sin is a breakdown in the relationship between us and God, or us and our neighbor. Christ came in love, preached love and is love. "Love does no wrong to a neighbor. He calls on the members of the church 'to have the same care for one another' and says, "avoid getting into debt, except the debt of mutual love". The most loving thing we can do for others is to nurture and deepen our own relationship with the Lord and to give expression to that relationship in our daily lives. Jesus also said " where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. This promise is that Christ is present to us when we live in unity and love. Jesus mentions the efficacy of community prayer in solving such problems, for Christ is present in the praying Christian community. In this way, we will be building each other up in the Lord, and there is no more important service we can render one another. Then, indeed, we will be watching out for one another. Amen.