

Deacon Mark Homily 9/6/20

Read: Ezekiel 33: 7-9; Romans 13: 8-10; Matthew 18: 15-20

We Are Our Brother's Keeper!

Good parents always try to protect their children, that's a given. From the moment they know they are pregnant through their entire life they protect and nurture their children. Good parents teach their children at a young age not to touch the stove and to keep away from the campfire. To hold your hand and look both ways when crossing a street and to tie their shoestrings and a thousand other things. And as a parent, you are always on the watch for their safety. Parents are really appointed watchmen for God; as our children belong to Him, they are on loan to us. Parents also have the task of correcting their children. Do you remember any times when you misbehaved as a child? I am sure you do, and I do too. I remember being corrected by my father. He did not correct me out of meanness, he did it out of love. He would tell me the reasons why I was being punished and it was never a surprise to me. I knew what I did wrong and I knew it was wrong when I did it. We both knew that I had disobeyed, he explained why there was a strict rule and the danger of not following; he was wise and fair. His concern was for my safety and a happy and fulfilling life. There was never any doubt in my mind that he loved me and my siblings. As our children grow, we are to do our best to steer them down the right path in life and if they travel down a wayward path then we are to do our best to warn them and try to dissuade them. Not only is it a parent's right, it is their responsibility. The same thing for their faith, as parents with young children you are the primary teachers in the faith. As parents with older children you need to share your wisdom and knowledge, always doing so with love and understanding. Sometimes, it calls for tough love. We see that tough love, from our Lord himself, in today's gospel. Our scripture readings today tell us that we have responsibilities beyond our own children and even beyond our own families to speak out or speak up when someone treads down the path of evil or sins against you. Many people will tell you, don't be concerned about so and so, he is not your responsibility, or it isn't any of your business! I know you have heard that response. But Jesus tells us otherwise. He is counting on us, perhaps we are the only person that is in a position to effect change in someone else. We must respond and we must do it in love. If we

decide not to speak so as to save someone from the pit of destruction, then we too will be held responsible. That is called the sin of omission. And none of us want to go to hell on account of someone else's sin. We must have the faith and courage to put the needs of the other (sinner) before our own. We see the parallels here throughout scripture, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves so we must do everything we possibly can to bring one back when he or she strays. We sort of hold each other accountable, not by being arrogant and judging our brothers and sisters but by reaching out to them when they are in trouble. We must not forget our Lord's words about judging others, that we cannot see the sliver in our brother's eye when a log is in our own. We also see the parable of the Good Shepherd here; Jesus left the 99 to seek out the one who had strayed, we are to do the same. St. James said in his Epistle, "whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his ways will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." We have the responsibility to speak with those who have fallen into a life of wickedness, a life of sin. God is counting on us to be His likeness and voice of love and caring for the needs of others, we are our brother's keeper. Jesus does not condemn us if we have followed the wrong path in life, he did not condemn Matthew or Zacchaeus, both were tax collectors and probably cheated others in the process of collecting taxes. They were hated and mistrusted by their neighbors. Jesus sought them out, ate with them, He forgave them, He loved them and guided them on to a right path. We are to do the same. And Jesus gave us the path to follow when someone sins against us: First, speak to the person alone, one on one, keeping it private. If the person refuses to listen and change their ways, again speak to the person in the presence of one or two others, carefully selecting a person or persons of good wisdom and reputation that would speak as our Lord would speak, with love and compassion. If that does not change that person's direction, then speak to the person before the Church. The Church is the community. If the person still refuses to turn from their evil ways, then he or she is then separated from the Church. We have done our part and we are not held responsible. Each step of the process involves as few a number of persons as possible with each successive step hoping that the person would be influenced to change his or her ways. The sin may be known only to two persons or it could be public, but still privacy is kept. Unnecessary publication of the sin is to be maintained. This will also avoid hurting the person and would allow that person to more easily mend his or her ways. So, we see a mutual responsibility

among all members of Christ's Church to go after the wandering sheep and do everything possible to bring them back into His fold. If we have that opportunity and choose not to speak up to assist another on the right path, we are held accountable by a sin of omission. So, we have that obligation to correct others just as we do for our own young children. Separation from the Church may mean that one may be banned from receiving the sacraments or even excommunication, a term we do not hear very often. The Church, like our Lord is very patient with us, giving us the opportunity to change our ways and repent and return to the fold. In recent years, especially around election time, Catholic Social teaching has been challenged by some individuals seeking public office. They identify that they are Catholics and indeed they are, as they were baptized Catholic and that cannot change. But they also make statements that clearly oppose Catholic Social teaching particularly about the subject of abortion, which the Church has always seen as a grossly mortal sin. A sin against the 5th Commandment, Thou shall not kill. When one is in the state of mortal sin they are no longer in union with the Church and cannot receive Holy Communion until attending Confession and being absolved of the mortal sin. The Code of Canon Law and the Catechism, states that anyone who "willed as an end or as a means, as well as cooperation in a direct abortion, is under the penalty of excommunication. Because, from the moment of his or her conception, the human being must be absolutely respected and protected in his integrity." If this has happened to you, know that our dear Lord is all love and mercy, the greater the sin, the greater His mercy. He reaches out to forgive and heal you, grasp His hand! Excommunication is not a permanent order but is meant to be a temporary measure, with the hope that the person who was excommunicated recognizes their error, repents, and is welcomed back into the fold. We occasionally see the Church declaring a state of excommunication upon someone who is publicly scandalizing the Church and may influence others into mortal sin and eternal damnation. But it is very rare, as the Church is to be foremost a Church of healing, forgiveness and salvation. As much as the Church tries to save and protect all from sin, it reaches out to the sinner. Jesus' words in today's gospel are not to rid the world of sinners as we all fall under that category, it is to help people recognize sin and encourage sinners to seek forgiveness and restore their place in the Church Community which gathers together in the name of Jesus where He is in the midst of them.