

## Homily by Fr. Anthony Davis

**“...If your erring brother listens to you, you have won him over...”**

September 6, 2020

23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

Ez 33:7-9; Rom 13:8-10 Mt 18:15-20

Today's readings are as relevant and practical in our lives today as they were thousands of years ago when they were first written. Together they remind us that as faithful Christians it is our responsibility to reach out to our not-so-faithful brothers and sisters and bring them back into the fold. In other words, today's readings invite us to review our I-don't-care attitude towards fallen and lax members of the church, reminding us that, yes, it should be our business to reach out to them.

Why then, should it be our business whether somebody else decides to serve God or not? As members of the church, we are not just a priestly people who offer sacrifice, we are also a prophetic people, meaning, we are God's spokespersons. Thus, today's first reading is, in fact, a compact job description that God gave to the prophet Ezekiel on what it means to be a prophetic person.

*“So you, I have made a sentinel for them. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. Yet if you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from their ways, they shall die in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from their ways, and they do not turn from their ways, they shall die in their iniquity, but you will have saved your life”(Ezek.33:7-9).*

Moreover, the clear and practical nature of this message is continued in the gospel, where we are told not just what to do, but how to do it. "If another member of the church sins (against you), go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one" (Matt.18:15).

In fact, today's message about a sin committed by a brother, is not intended to provide an outline for an increasingly intense juridical procedure, whose intention is to get a person to admit that he's wrong so that he can be punished. It is an exercise of love for the brother who is a sinner- a lost sheep. Love, which knows no limits, moves one to do whatever can be done to bring back the brother from a place of serious sin to the joy of repentance.

Hence the increasing intensity—from a one-on-one conversation to a small group, to “the Church”, to pointing out that the sin has broken the person's relationships with the Body—only illustrates the depth of love one ought to have for the sinner. Hence the motivation for this kind of Christian action is to "regain" your brother or sister, to restore the broken relationship, not primarily to denounce or find out who is right or wrong.

Indeed, naturally, when we have been seriously hurt by another person, the sting tends to propel us toward seeking some form of revenge or making the offender hurt in some way. But the gospel proposes love as a remedy!!

In the culture in which we live, we seem to vacillate between two extremes. On the one hand we hear voices constantly shouting on social media, broadcasting someone's faults to a wide audience. On the other hand, many of us revert to a complete withdrawal from pointing out faults, usually with "who am I to judge?" as our justification. It seems that on both ends, the focus remains on "me," rather than on love for a person who sins.

Consequently, in the face of someone who is in serious sin, we are called to go against the tendency to think only of ourselves and, instead, to pray for the grace to love the sinner, to see in him or her the lost sheep.

Then, moved by love, we ask for the grace to do whatever it takes to bring the sinner to repentance. Therefore, when St. Paul (2<sup>nd</sup> reading) says that "*we are to owe nothing to anyone except to love one another*", he is not referring to something sentimental. Rather, that our love must extend to those attitudes and actions that would prevent our neighbors from truly loving themselves and their own destiny. By this, "If your brother listens to you, you have won him over", because Jesus himself is in the midst of such love.