

Homily for 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A. September 10, 2017

First Reading Ezk 33:7-9, Rom 13:8-10, Gospel Matth 18:15-20

Theme: Seek Better Relationship with God and Your Neighbour.

Today's Gospel message teaches us that true love does not close its eyes to defeats and does not leave situations and people as they are with their limitations and defects. True love ought to go beyond focusing on the defects of the other. Rather, it points to the fact that correction to be fraternal and not to fall to the level of instinctive resentment must be inspired by love and ready for forgiveness.

Thus, to realize this goal of true love for the other, Jesus teaches us that we should not delay in reconciling with any person. When we are hurt or offended by anyone, we should spare no effort to make that person admit the fault, and to get things right again between us and the person in a fraternal manner. Basically, it means that we must never tolerate any situation in which there is a breach of personal relationship between us and another person. If anyone offends us there is only one way to settle it, face to face talk. However, as human beings we know how difficult this might be, but not talking over our broken relationship is very dangerous as this can destroy our own peace of mind. Thus, by not addressing our grievances against the other immediately it may turn into a mountain heap thereby making reconciliation difficult.

The second stage advocated in the Gospel in this reconciliatory journey is to involve the assistance of a wise person. It is not to prove that the person has committed the offense but aimed to help in the process of reconciliation. Often times, people hate those whom they have injured most, and it may be that nothing we can say can win them back. Jesus is saying that to talk matters over with some wise and gracious people is to create a new atmosphere in which there is at least a chance that we should see ourselves "as others see us".

Then we come to the last part. Matthew says even if that fails and does not succeed, then treat that person or regard him or her as a Gentile or tax collector. The first impression we get is that the person concerned must be abandoned as a hopeless case and irreclaimable but that is not what Jesus is saying. What was his attitude towards tax collectors and Gentile? If we look at the life of Jesus each time he encounters tax collectors and Gentile he always speaks to them with sympathy, mercy, gentleness and then reaches out to them with love. So what Jesus is saying to us is; when we have done all these and the person is still stubborn and obdurate, we may think that we have given the sinner every chance and think that they are no better than tax collectors and gentile. Be kind to them and love them. Do not see their case as helpless. Jesus is saying my experience of them is that they too, have a heart to be touched, and there are many of them like Matthew and Zacchaeus who have become my best friends,