

Homily – 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Ezekiel 33:7–9; Romans 13:8–10; Matthew 18:15–20

My dear brothers and sisters,

Today's readings speak about something that is both simple and difficult: our responsibility for one another. We live in a world where we often hear: *"It is my life. It is none of your business. You look after yourself, and I will look after myself."* Even sometimes in our families and in our parish community, we can think that way. But Jesus gives us a different way of living. He reminds us that as Christians, we do not live only for ourselves. We belong to one another because we belong to Christ.

In the First Reading, God says to the prophet Ezekiel: "I have appointed you as a watchman for the house of Israel." A watchman has a responsibility. If he sees danger approaching, he cannot simply remain silent. He has to warn the people. He does not warn them because he hates them, but precisely because he cares about them. That is also our responsibility as Christians.

Sometimes we see a member of our family going in the wrong direction. Perhaps a husband or wife is struggling with something. Perhaps a child or young person is making choices that may harm his or her future. Perhaps a friend is becoming distant from God or from the practice of faith. Perhaps we see someone in our parish hurting another person. What do we do? Sometimes we say, *"It is their business. I don't want to get involved."* Sometimes we talk about the person to somebody else, but we never speak to the person himself or herself. And sometimes we simply remain silent. But today Jesus says: If you love someone, sometimes you must have the courage to speak.

However, there is an important difference between correction and criticism. Correction says: *"I care about you, and I don't want to see you hurt yourself or others."* Criticism says: *"You are a bad person."* Correction comes from love. Criticism often comes from pride. That is why, before I correct somebody, I need to ask myself: Am I doing this because I love this person, or because I am angry with this person? That is a very important question.

There is another lesson in today's Gospel. Jesus tells us that if someone does something wrong against us, we should first go and speak to that person privately. That is very practical advice. If someone has hurt me, my first instinct may be to tell everybody else. We may tell our spouse. We may tell our children. We may tell our friends. We may even tell somebody in the parish! And by the time we finally speak to the person who hurt us, almost everybody already knows the story. Jesus says: "Go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone."

What a beautiful and sensible way of dealing with conflict! If someone has hurt you, speak to that person. Don't immediately make the problem bigger. Don't collect supporters. Don't spread the story. Don't allow anger to grow. Go with humility and say: *"You hurt me. Can we talk about it?"* And perhaps we may discover that the other person did not intend to hurt us at all.

My dear friends, many problems in our families and communities become much bigger because we speak about one another instead of speaking to one another.

And there is something else we need to remember: we all need correction. None of us is perfect. As a priest, I also need people who can honestly tell me when I am wrong. I need people who can say, *"Father, perhaps you could have handled that differently."* It is not always easy to hear such words. Our pride can say, *"Who are you to tell me?"* But sometimes the person who corrects us is actually doing us a great service.

We should therefore create a parish community where we can speak honestly to one another, but always with charity, respect and humility. Our parish is not a collection of perfect people. It is a family of people who are trying to follow Jesus.

We come here carrying different burdens. Some are worried about their children. Some are lonely. Some are grieving. Some are struggling in their marriages. Some are worried about their health or finances. Some may quietly be losing their faith. We may not know what another person is carrying. That is why we must be gentle with one another.

Sometimes a simple question—*"Are you all right?"*—can mean a great deal. Sometimes sitting beside someone who is lonely can be more powerful than giving advice. Sometimes inviting someone back to Mass, offering a cup of tea, making a phone call, or simply listening can help a person find hope again. This is what it means to be keepers of one another.

And Jesus gives us the final and perhaps most beautiful message today: *"Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."* What a wonderful promise for our parish.

When we gather for Mass, Christ is here. When we pray together, Christ is here. When we forgive one another, Christ is here. When we reach out to someone who is lonely, Christ is here. When we sit with a grieving family, Christ is there. When we put aside an old disagreement and say, *"Let us begin again,"* Christ is there.

My dear brothers and sisters, perhaps today Jesus is asking each of us a very simple question: Who is the person I need to speak to with love? Maybe it is a member of my family. Maybe it is someone I have been avoiding. Maybe I need to ask forgiveness. Maybe I need to forgive somebody. Maybe there is someone who needs my encouragement rather than my criticism. Or perhaps there is someone who simply needs me to notice them.

Let us remember the words of St Paul: *"Love your neighbour as yourself."* Christian love is not simply being pleasant to one another. Christian love sometimes means having the courage to correct, the humility to accept correction, and the generosity to forgive.

Let us pray today that our parish may become more and more a family of faith, where we look after one another, speak to one another with charity, forgive one another generously, and never allow anyone to feel that he or she is alone.

And when we gather here, let us remember the promise of Jesus: *"Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."*

May Christ always be at the centre of our families, our parish and our relationships with one another.

Amen.

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