

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
On Fraternal Correction and Bringing Healing
Ezekiel 33:7–9; Psalm 95:1–2, 6–7, 8–9; Romans 13:8–10; Matthew 18:15–20

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It's easy to point out when someone makes a mistake, but being gentle and forgiving toward the person who made the mistake is much harder. When someone does something wrong or disagrees with us, people often talk about them with others or post about it online. Social media lets everyone speak up, but it doesn't always show us how to use our words well.

Today's readings invite us to reflect on our Christian duty to correct others with firmness and care. They are gentle reminders from above. As the responsorial psalm says: "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Ps 95:8). Our hearts don't grow hard all at once; they harden over time when we ignore what matters. So we ask God to help us stay open to his wisdom this weekend.

God tells Ezekiel that we have a responsibility to warn and help others when they go astray. If we ignore this responsibility, we also share in what happens next (cf. Ez. 33:7-9). This duty is rooted in Christian love. St. Paul teaches us to love our neighbor as ourselves because love does no harm. In this way, love fulfills the law (cf. Rom. 9:9-10).

Jesus teaches us how to respond when someone makes a mistake. He gives us a process: First, talk privately with the person instead of gossiping, since gossip only spreads negativity. If that does not work, ask one or two trusted people to help. In serious cases, go to the appropriate authorities. The goal is always to heal and restore relationships. If nothing else works, Jesus says to treat the person as a Gentile or tax collector, which means stepping back and praying for them (cf. Matt. 18:15-17). But let's focus on the first step, since this is where we often fall short. He says, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him about his fault between you and him alone" (Matt. 18:15). Notice what Jesus says: Go to your brother. He doesn't tell us to tell everyone else first or post about it online. He simply tells us to go directly to the person.

The Christian way of correcting others isn't about shaming or embarrassing them, but about helping to restore them. Jesus says, "If he listens to you, you have won your brother over" (Matt. 18:15). When we correct someone, we should ask ourselves, "Why do I want to do this?" Is it because I care about them, or just to prove I'm right? We can tell the truth and still be unkind. We might win an argument but lose a friend. We can be right and still miss what it means to be Christian. It helps to remember that at the heart of Jesus' forgiveness is restoring us to God's friendship. God's mercy restores our dignity. We are called to show mercy because God showed us mercy first.

Our Lord wants us to speak directly to people rather than talk behind their backs. He says, "Tell him about his fault between you and him alone." Sadly, people often talk about others instead of going to them. Sometimes the person involved is the last to learn there's a problem. As followers of Jesus, before we post, forward messages, or tell others, let's remember to go straight to our brother or sister and handle it privately. Why keep it private? Because love protects a person's dignity, even when they make mistakes.

Of course, in serious situations such as abuse, violence, crime, or threats to public safety, we must report them to the appropriate authorities. Christian love does not mean covering up wrongdoing or protecting someone who has done wrong. But in everyday disagreements and misunderstandings, we should return to the Christian way: sitting together, speaking honestly, listening humbly, praying, and seeking to understand one another.

And of course, this is easier said than done. But notice how today's Gospel ends. Jesus says: "I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:19-20). This is what our divided world needs most: to put Jesus at the center, not our pride, politics, or opinions.

I remember a parishioner who taught me a lot about living out Jesus' teachings. Her daughter, who had just finished high school, left home to live with her boyfriend. At first, she felt angry and wanted to confront them, but she paused and asked herself, "What is God telling me?" Instead of reacting in anger, she spent a month praying and reading the Bible. She pictured Jesus with her as she shared her feelings. This helped her remember the love she always had for her daughter and realize she couldn't give up on her. She saw that she needed to change herself before trying to correct her daughter. When she was ready, she went to see her daughter and her future son-in-law. They began to talk openly and honestly. In the end, her daughter and her boyfriend graduated, found jobs, got married in the Church, and now have two children.

This mother's story shows Jesus' wisdom in action. When you need to correct someone, do so with love, speak directly to the person, and avoid treating them as an enemy, even if you disagree. Pray for them. Trust that God's mercy will reveal the wisdom in the consequences of the act.

Our life as followers of Jesus is a continual learning to remain brothers and sisters in Christ, even when we disagree. It's about joining our hearts and hands to help each other journey toward a life of ongoing conversion.

"If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Ps 95:8).

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