

23rd Sunday in ordinary time- A: Love speaks, saves and restores: Ezk 33:7-9; Rom 13:8-10; Mt 18:15-20

A pastor preached a wonderful sermon, saying we should love our enemies. And, when he got through, he asked, *"Is there anybody in the congregation who can truthfully say that he or she has no enemies?"* An old gentleman got up said, *"Father, I have not got no enemies."* So, the Pastor tells the congregation, *"Let's listen. This man has the secret. He can teach us something. Go ahead, sir, now tell us how we do that."* The old man said, *"Oh, it isn't hard. You see, I've outlived all those rascals."*

Today, as we reflect on the liturgy of the word, I am reminded of two incidents that happened in the lives of St. Mother Teresa, and late Pope Francis. Someone once asked, St. Mother Teresa, why do you correct your sisters when they make mistakes? She replied, because I love them. If I didn't care, I wouldn't bother. Love doesn't say, "do whatever you want". Love says, "I want you to become the person God created you to be". That is exactly what Saint Paul means when he says, **"love is the fulfillment of the law"** Rom 13:10. Late Pope Francis once beautifully said, **"a brother or sister who lovingly corrects you, is one of God's greatest gifts. Friends who only flatter us, may make us comfortable, but friends who lovingly challenges, help us become saints"**.

In the first reading we see, "love does not remain silent when someone is walking toward danger. It has the courage to warn." God appoints Ezekiel as a watchman, because true love values a person's soul, more than temporary comfort. Silence may feel safe, but a loving correction can save a life and lead a sinner back to God. **Thes 5:11: "Encourage one another and build up each other." Gal 6:1 "Restore such a one in a Spirit of gentleness." 1Cor 16:14 "Let all that you do be done in love."**

In the 2nd reading, St. Paul reminds us that the greatest debt we owe one another is the debt of love. Real love does not harm, exploit or ignore. It protects, forgives, and seeks the good of others. When love fills our hearts, we naturally fulfill God's commandments because love is the heart of the gospel. In other words, **"Love is our permanent debt." Jn 15:12 "Love one another as I have loved you." 1 Jn3:18 "Let us love not in word of speech, but in truth and action." "Love is the only debt that becomes greater every time we faithfully pay it."**

In the gospel, we see Jesus teaches us that fraternal correction is not about winning an argument, but winning back a brother or sister. The goal is never humiliation, but reconciliation, never condemnation, but restoration. When truth is spoken with love, and forgiveness is embraced, Christ himself is present, healing broken

relationships. Eph 4:15 **“speak the truth in love.”** Mt 18:22 **“Not 7 times but 77 times.”** Col 3:13 **“Bear with one another and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”**

Our takeaway from today's Sunday is: First, have the courage to speak the truth in love. It is said, that truth without love hurts. Love without truth deceives. Don't remain silent when someone you love is making harmful choices. Correct gently, privately and prayerfully. Not to judge, but to save.

Second, let love be your greatest commandment. Another saying which goes like this. Where love leads, the law is fulfilled. Before every word and every action, ask yourself, is this loving? Will this bring someone closer to God?

Third, become a builder of reconciliation and restoration. It is also said that peace begins when someone chooses to take the first step in our families, communities, workplaces. Be the first to take the initiative to heal broken relationships. Jesus calls us not to win arguments, but to win hearts, because reconciliation is one of the greatest signs of God's presence. Love that remains silent is incomplete, love that speaks without compassion is harsh. But love that speaks the truth with mercy has the power to save and restore. May we become Christians, who speak with courage. Love with sincerity, and restore with mercy, so that others may encounter the healing presence of Christ through us. Amen