

TWENTY=THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Year A)
9-6-2026 Homily.

I. Introduction

Jesus talks about the need that sometimes arises for us to correct other people—and this is something many of us find difficult or unpleasant. It can be hard to find the right balance between the extremes of saying nothing about wrong behavior, or coming on too strongly. Even some of the saints had trouble in this regard. An example is St. Boniface of Lausanne—not the famous 8th century missionary who is considered the apostle of Germany, but a different Boniface, who lived in the 13th century. He was born in Brussels, and at the age of 17 went to study at the University of Paris, where, after graduating, he stayed on as an instructor. Boniface was brilliant but controversial; he became very holy, but was deficient in what we would call “people skills.” Though still young, Boniface was one of the best-known lecturers at the university—but after a series of disputes with his students, they went on strike and would no longer attend his lectures. Realizing that maybe he didn’t have enough tact to be successful as a university professor, Boniface left Paris and taught at a school in Cologne; two years later he was appointed bishop of Lausanne in Switzerland.

For eight years Bishop Boniface labored zealously in his diocese, but his forthright, “in your face” style again got him into trouble. He wanted to reform various abuses, including many by the clergy, but instead of working with his priests quietly and privately, he publicly denounced their weaknesses from the pulpit—a move which greatly angered them but didn’t solve any of the problems. Boniface also managed to make a lifelong enemy of the emperor, which may explain the brutal mugging he experienced at the hands of unknown assailants. Convinced that he was also unfit for the office of bishop, Boniface went to the pope and begged to be removed. His request was granted, and he went back to his hometown of Brussels, where the abbess of the local convent invited him to reside as a chaplain for the sisters. Boniface accepted this offer, and evidently he finally learned how to get along with people, as he remained there for the rest of his life, and is now recognized as a saint.

Standing up for the truth in a firm but loving way isn’t always easy, especially if it involves correcting others—but it’s part of the Church’s mission, and sometimes part of our individual duty as Christians. Jesus calls us to bear witness to His truth in a spirit of love, humility, and prayerfulness—for only when we use this approach can we be sure He is with us.

II. Development

The 21st century has been a difficult time for the Church in the United States, for we’ve seen the clergy sexual abuse scandal, the Covid shutdown, and now the restructuring process—not just here in Detroit, but in many other dioceses across the country. There have also been instances of priests publicly promoting ideas or behaviors contrary to Church teaching, and bishops advocating “woke” agendas or partisan political causes, all while downplaying or ignoring traditional Catholic doctrine and morality. Quite naturally, this has caused distress, anger, and confusion among the laity, leaving them unprepared to face the moral issues and challenges of the day. As the Lord warns in the 1st Reading from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, a watchman is supposed to sound the alarm when danger appears, and

if he doesn't, he will be held accountable—and unlike the imperfect judgments of human courts, God's justice is absolute and inescapable. That's why we have a moral duty to warn those whose actions are leading them away from salvation—but as Jesus tells us, we must do so in a way designed to bring about a response of repentance, not anger or rejection. We should correct others privately, only involving other witnesses and the authority of the Church if truly necessary. If this fails, we can next practice a form of “tough love” by shunning the person—but even then, we must continue praying for him or her, and gladly welcome that person's repentance should it occur. As St. Paul tells us, love is the highest debt we owe to others—and sometimes love requires us to say things others don't want to hear.

III. Conclusion

According to St. John Vianney, people are “often carried away over the sins and shortcomings of others. It would be far better to talk *less* about them and to pray *more*.” Prayer should always be our first reaction when we see or hear someone doing something morally dangerous or offensive; praying for the person may help him or her spiritually, and will aid us in knowing whether the Lord wants us to take things a step further. It's especially helpful to ask others to pray about the situation, too, for in the Gospel Jesus says that shared prayer of this sort is very powerful. Many times prudence will suggest that we make no response to the situation other than praying for the persons involved, but sometimes God wants us to take additional steps. That will almost always be true in regard to people over whom we have authority, such as parents correcting misbehavior by their children, and quite often true in regard to persons over whom we have some influence. For instance, if someone wants to share with us the latest gossip about a mutual acquaintance, we can simply say, “That's too bad; have you prayed for him?,” or “What can we do to help her?” This is a gentle way of giving a good example to the person who wants to gossip or judge.

Whenever we have to correct someone, we should do so in a humble spirit; one way of doing this is by asking for favors instead of giving commands. For instance, if someone is talking during Mass, rather than saying “Be quiet! Don't you know how to behave in church?,” we might instead say, “Could I ask a favor? If you could be a little quieter, that would help me pay attention to Mass.” When we give correction, it's important that it be done in a loving spirit. For example, the parents or relatives of a young couple living together before marriage might gently say, “What you're doing is morally wrong, and we can't approve of it, but even so, we will always love you and accept you.” If necessary, we can involve other people in the process of giving correction, as happens when family and friends confront an alcoholic who denies he has a problem, or even practice shunning as a form of tough love, as in the case of the parents of a teenage drug addict who kick her out of their home until she agrees to get treatment. All these actions must be done in a spirit of genuine love and humility, and be supported and directed by ongoing prayer.

As the story of St. Boniface of Lausanne shows, not everyone finds it easy to give gentle but effective criticism—but sometimes this is part of our Christian duty. We would feel terribly guilty if part of the reason another person's life ended in moral ruin was our failure to say the right thing at the right time. Jesus doesn't want this to happen, and sometimes He chooses us to sound the alarm when someone else is in moral danger. As long as we proceed in prayerfulness, humility, and love, we can be sure He will be pleased with our efforts.