

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time, September 6, 2026

Brothers and sisters, “*Owe nothing to anyone except love one another*” writes Paul to the Romans. The first reading and the Gospel reading remind us that sometimes this love requires fraternal correction. And you may have to tell a dear one clearly and tactfully, without nagging, that certain words, actions, or even a lifestyle, are morally contrary to God's law and Christian virtue. We hear Jesus instruct his followers that “*if a brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.*” We see that we are first to go and talk to the person, not about him or her, not behind his or her back, not at or down to the person, but you talk to one another and to listen to their side, too. What stands out to me in this passage is that Christ does not say, “if your brother or sister annoys you. If your brother or sister disagrees with you, if your brother or sister hurts your feelings,” the Lord does say, “*if your brother sins against you*”. This requires prayerful discernment to determine if the incident was an actual sin. Or possibility of hurt feelings, perhaps our pride was wounded, potentially his or her action was in response to our own sinful behavior, a variation of all that has been listed for some other reason. It takes careful discernment to decide what's going on. Importantly, whenever there is tension in relationships, especially the family, I was reminded by this quote from Archbishop Sheen, he said, “We no longer have to wear hair shirts in our family or wear hair shirts inside out, rub up against their skin for penance. We don't have to wear them in our faith because we have family members.”

Whenever there are tensions in relationships, family, work, or even within the Church, especially if the relationship completely breaks down, we are tempted to put the other person on trial. Sometimes we tell our stories to others. Sometimes we tell ourselves stories about the motives. We provide witnesses, and we even reverse evidence. What we do is gossip, detract, and create factions. And this is a character assassination, and in effect, it tears someone down behind their back. It goes against the Eighth Commandment “You shall not bear false witness.”

Now being honest with ourselves, we will recognize that at times, we have all done this. We have all the assumed motives for your first grievances of spoken ill of someone, but we should have spoken to them. We've all been tempted to explain away our faults, while, at the same time, magnifying the faults of others. And this is why Jesus first calls us to conversion of heart before he calls us to correct our brother or sister. If we are unwilling to take responsibility for our actions, in our wounded pride, we begin to build a case against another person. We highlight their faults. We question their motives, gather supporters to tell our side of the story, assume our own sins of gossip, detraction, resentment, manipulation, and vision, begin to feel justified. We dehumanize the person until they become the villain of our own story. And once we have convinced ourselves that they are solely the problem, we can justify our behaviors. Behaviors that we normally would recognize as sinful. Thus, we see a pattern emerge - sin, self-justification, accusation, and division.

The Gospel pattern, the pattern for us Christians, - sin, humility, confession, talk to the person, and reconciliation. Additionally, the more guilty we feel, the more tempted we are to make someone out to be that villain. Not because they are entirely evil, or because we necessarily tend to lie. No, but because if they are the problem, then we do not have to face our own part.

Importantly, in Scriptures, Christ gives us a different path.

Before we are to speak about another person, we are supposed to speak to the person. Before we are to judge motives, we are to seek understanding. Before we condemn, we are to examine our own hearts. Christ instructs the faithful, his disciples to first take out the log from our own eyes and then we will see clearly to take the spec out of our brother or sister's eyes.

Today, we hear Jesus say, *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won your brother, you have won over your brother."*

Christ gives his Church a process for addressing serious wrong beliefs. Always beginning with private conversation, and only aimed at reconciliation, aimed at communion in union with each other in the mystical body of Christ. Even when discipline becomes necessary, the goal remains the salvation of soul and restoration of communion, not punishment. The goal is to bring people in line with Christ's church. Of note, the emphasis on fraternal correction is placed on reconciliation, not condemnation. This is the focus for us living out our Christian faith. Our Lord's process for correcting others is aimed at winning back a brother or sister not to prove someone else wrong. The focus is on healing relationships. It is about

restoration, reconciliation, and communion. Again, not condemning. The Church is called to be led in reconciliation. The goal of correction is not victory, but unity.

Now, the first chapter in reconciliation is not proving another person he is wrong. It is refusing to assume the worst about them. The first step in reconciliation is refusing to assume the worst about them. In the second reading, St. Paul reminds us that love is the lens to which we are to interpret each other's actions. Suspicion asks, how would they hurt you? Love asks, what might be going on, you know? What might be going on in their world?

What is striking about the Gospel message is that Jesus assumes the goal is not proving who is right. The goal is, if you listen, you have won over your brother. It's not about winning an argument, not to win a battle of wills, not to win a power struggle, but to bring a brother or sister back to full union with Christ and his Church.

Christ wants all of us when the relationship becomes strained and trust erodes, and we are tempted to talk about one another instead of to one another. He wants us to come to him in prayer, to seek his understanding, ask for his help, remove the log from our eyes first, and ask for his wisdom, courage, and strength to go talk to and with another person. Not to win them over, but to be able to forgive and to be open to reconciliation. Again, whenever we experience criticism or conflict, our first reaction is to conclude that someone else has sinned against us, but

before we reach that conclusion, the Lord asks us to seek his understanding.

Sometimes what needs healing is not another person's sin, not another person's actions, but our own assumptions, our own beliefs. And even when there is real fault, where there's a real injury here, Jesus calls us first to conversion, not to condemnation. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. The Christian response to conflict is not accusation, but reconciliation, desire for full communion. Before we speak about another brother or sister, Christ calls us to speak to them so that the relationship may be healed and communion restored.

So today, as we kneel before the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, we ask God for the graces to turn away from all of our sin in order that our hearts may not remain hardened and remain in our love for one another. Talk with our brother or sister out of the desire of reconciliation and desire for communion now and for all eternity in our heavenly kingdom.