

Week 23 Ordinary Time - 2026

Ezekiel: 33:7-9; Ps 94:1-2; Romans 13:8-19; Matt 18:15-20

How do we tell someone who is doing something wrong, or has done something wrong, that they need to try and fix it? How do we re-establish communion with someone once it has been broken? How do we do this rooted in truth? Granted it is not straightforward. It is too easy to come across as self-righteous, a busy-body or even as a hypocrite. Is it even our place to do such a thing, as correcting someone? Today's readings seem to indicate that not only is it your place, it is your responsibility before God.

Leave aside the trivial, like annoying habits, brusqueness, a lack of thoughtfulness. That is the role of parents and family and friends, and even then, it might be better to learn patience than go to war over something that is just irritating or socially embarrassing. Today's scripture has something bigger in its sights than this: such as knowing someone living off of ill-gotten gains, being an abuser, of living with a partner outside of marriage, or spouting racial hatred.

This Sunday's readings, although each with a different emphasis speaks of correcting wrong-doers. I suspect that for some of us those words – 'wrongdoing' and 'sin' - make us seize up, we feel like a deer in the headlights: we know danger is coming, but we don't know where to run to. Maybe we can find safety in piece of familiar scripture. Luke's Gospel seems ideal: "*Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned*"... and "*Why do you see the speck*

that is in your brother's eye but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"¹ Phew, I am safe. I am not to judge, in fact who am I to judge? I may not like someone else's actions or words, and find them harmful, but I won't say anything. Maybe I will just pray for them, or sigh a lot. What else can one do? Hope for the best...

God calls the prophet Ezekiel a "watchman." He is like a sentry in a tower, placed to protect a village community. When he hears or sees danger his job is to alert the inhabitants of the approach of that danger. If they ignore Ezekiel, that is their problem: they will die and he will live. If they listen to him and turn away from wickedness then both they and he will live. If the he – remember he is the watchman - says nothing then both he and the inhabitants will die, and he will be held responsible with his soul.

It is part of the role of the Church in the current age to listen to the Holy Spirit and to assign watchmen – bishops, priests, & prophets - to watch over her and protect her – people and institutions - from moral danger. That role is God given and answerable to God: to be moral gatekeeper for the community. But each of us share in that role.

St Paul's letter to the Romans comes with a warning a bit more personal: '*You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet*'. If you do any of these, you will die in God's eyes because they are anti-love. But, these are really a set of examples rather than the core message that Paul is trying to convey. For Paul all Christian lives should have this at their centre: '*Owe no one anything, except to love each other*' and '*You shall love your neighbour as yourself.*' For Paul, love is an inexhaustible debt, because of what

¹ Luke 6: 37, 39, 41.

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we have received from Christ: inexhaustible love.² A recognition of this debt requires us to look inward, to see what we have in our hearts, and if it is not pleasing to God to confront it so that we may be in communion with Him. We are to be watchman over our own hearts and minds.

When faced with the need to confront the wrongdoing of others, we are not simply drawing attention to the faults of others, but yearning to draw them back into communion with us. Once we have this necessary understanding, then Jesus' words in the Gospel make more sense, because we can address the faults of others first with self-understanding, which then permits us to reach out to a fellow sinner with love. How do we do this? Well probably never with social media of any sort. You would be well advised to keep your disputes off it entirely.

The initial approach should be private and personal, you are not trying to shame him, *'Go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.'* If this fails, you go with witnesses. These witnesses are not there to gang up on the person who has wronged you, but to arbitrate between you. They are to speak reason and peace. If that fails then you go to those who have wisdom and appointed authority in such matters. If that fails you walk away. You have done what love demands of you.

True correction starts with a candid recognition of one's own faults and weaknesses, as well as a determined effort to correct them. Back in Luke's Gospel where we found excuses not to say anything, Jesus also said, *'take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see*

*clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.'*³ This is not an invitation to inaction, it is an alarm call to shake ourselves into shape because others need our help. It accepts the duty towards our brothers and sisters and our community, which demands that – with charity and humility– we point out what has gone wrong. It says, 'We are in this together.' This is loving your neighbour as yourself. This is what you are to do.

² Byrne, Brendan: Sacra Bagina: Romans, pp 394-395

³ Luke 6:42