

September 6, 2020 C
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ezekiel 33:7-9 (p.206)
Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9
Romans 13:8-10
Matthew 18:15-20

“You are just O Lord, and your judgment is right; treat your servant
in accord with your merciful love.”

Today’s antiphon sets the stage for our homily today in that for the past few weeks we have been talking about what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and then what might the Lord God expect from His disciples.

To begin with, we fully acknowledge that salvation is a free gift from God the Father based on the merits of the incarnation, death, burial, and resurrection of His Only Begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ; however, as part of the redemptive covenant God does expect us to present our bodies as living sacrifices, keep His Commandments, and truly love others.

The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel gave a strong warning to all those whom God called to stand as watchmen on the wall. Traditionally, watchmen were soldiers placed on the wall surrounding a city where their job was to scan the horizon or nearby hiding places on the lookout for the advancing enemy.

Posted as sentry guards, these individuals could be men or women, as long as they were diligent and responsible. Theirs was the task of providing an early warning system and detecting any danger approaching the camp or city.

Here it is important to note that the safety of every life inside the community was contingent on these trusted souls. For a watchman to not warn the people of an eminent danger was paramount to the worst form of treason and punishable by death.

Indeed, God placed spiritual watchmen within the nation of Israel, but He also later placed watchmen within the Early Church. The Early Church Fathers were called by God to educate the people and warn them of impending danger, danger usually resulting from ignorance, disobedience and sin, and/or lack of zeal for God.

Today watchmen still continue to maintain a crucial role in protecting individual faith communities and the Church at large from the dangers of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Appointed by God, and recognized by the local community, these people are required to act and speak with utmost discernment and humility.

Theirs is the job of prayer, fasting, and discernment. Concerning events taking place in the church and the world, they are not to be impulsive alarmist. They must be willing to spend time alone with God listening and discerning the times and the seasons. Like sentry guards who stand alone on post, they utilize the silence of solitude to listen for the voice of the Lord.

Many would agree that we live in a world that is on the verge of chaos such as never seen before. Not that the world has not seen its share of violence in the past but never before has it possessed the wherewithal to wreak such havoc on a global basis. So a logical question is - where are the watchman on the wall? Who in the Church is standing at the cusp of current events discerning the next spiritual season and guiding the way for God's people?

Asked the same question this is how the OT prophet Isaiah responded:

Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me” (Isaiah 6:8)

Here we must ask, what say we? Does God in the Holy Scriptures define us as willing to stand guard for the truth and defend justice as watchmen and women on the wall?

Thus the Apostle Paul reminds us, “Brother and Sisters: owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” Indeed, we have learned that the whole law is fulfilled in one simple commandment, love God and love one another. “Love does no evil to the neighbor, love is the fulfillment of the law.” What better way to love someone than to warn them of impending danger?

Unfortunately these commandments are often interpreted or followed with a “blinded eye attitude”. Please explain, well here is an example of a blinded eye attitude. If I love my neighbor then I must somehow respect and accept his/her right to a personal choice to act any way they want to act.

Unfortunately cloaked and clouded in seemingly benign terms like political correctness, or a one world order tolerance for all types of anti-biblical diversity and fanaticism, or even a ultra “lais sez-faire” “live and let live” philosophy that favors a few at the expense of the many - this kind of thinking encourages and facilitates wrong as viewed as right and right to become wrong. Subsequently these types of philosophies often run counter to God’s holy Commandments?

You see, blinded eye passivism in this form does really not love at all; no instead it is a part of a well-planned activist agenda to force others to accept values contrary to Scripture and classical Christianity.

Subsequently, the disciple of Christ is forced to make a decision, do I remain silent and let evil co-exist with no resistance or do I take a stand against it? So where do we draw the line? When do we stand up for what we know God states as pure and holy?

Here we must once again look to Scripture, Tradition, and history for the answers. The Bible states in 1 Peter 4:17, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" My sense here is that if the so called Church Militant remains silent in judging sin because it houses its own sin then evil will fill continue to the void the Church leaving it so much less Triumphant.

Therefore, it would seem reasonable to suggest that today's Gospel reading deplores the notion of "turning a blind eye" when it comes to sin. Indeed, evil and sin must be confronted. Now this is where it can get really hard sometimes. We often mentioned that some of the teachings of Jesus could be hard to understand – right? Well this teaching will necessitate a great deal of courage and discernment on our parts.

Jesus said, "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. If he does not listen take one or two others with you. . . . If he refuses to listen to them, tell the Church. . . . For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

So then, if a person in the local church sins against you, Scripture states that you are to go to him or her with a goal to work it out. If they will not listen, then you are to take a godly friend or two and attempt to resolve the conflict.

If they still will not listen to Scripture and sound reason then the matter is to be brought to the leadership of the local assembly and they will intervene, or bring the matter before the whole community of faith.

If they still will not repent, they are to be excluded from fellowship and the benefits afforded by the Body of Christ. Hence people need not be afraid to confront evil and sin; in fact, it is their duty to try and restore those who have erred from the way of truth.

But what of those who are not Christ followers or those who are intolerant of the Christian faith? How do we treat those who seek to cause us harm, and those who have declared themselves as enemies of the Church and/or the State? Are we to safeguard our faith and wellbeing when attacked by enemies? And then to complicate matters, what do we do with the parable of the tares and the wheat?

First of all, the parable of the tares and the wheat addresses the world and not the Church. In that particular parable Jesus reveals that He is the main sower, yet He does allow the enemy to also sow bad seed, seed that looks good at first, intermingles with the select, but in the end bears no good fruit. Here Jesus reminded the disciples to let both grow together until the appointed time when His angels will do a thorough harvesting, bring both to judgment where ultimately the evil will be separated from the good.

So, what can we learn from these Scriptural passages and the discussion so far? First and foremost God does not allow evil and

sin to go unaddressed. It appears that the heart of the matter is set in the context of the forgiveness of sin and the restoration of the sinner. When a person has been wronged, he/she is to not be silent but address the issue.

Here we note that the Lord has provided the Church with a due process for dealing with evil and sin. An unrepentant person is to be treated as an outsider and in some cases even delivered over to Satan in that his soul might be saved in the end. But what of the world how is the Christian to act in the face of evil and tyranny in the world?

Jesus said love your enemy, and turn the other cheek. So then are Christians to confront sin in the church but remain passive with the world and allow evil to run over what they know to be good and holy? No, not exactly.

These are difficult questions to reckon with. Not only do Christian leaders struggle with these issues but so as well do secular leaders. I believe that to properly discern the right answer one must first look to Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith. However and again, before any judgment of the world can take place, judgment must first start within the Church. When its windows are clean then it will have the ability to correctly judge the world's smudges.

If the Church is walking without sin, then it will have the ability to judge the world of its wrongdoing, bind Satan, and ask or loose the power of the Holy Spirit to pour out His grace on all concerned. Without some form of abiding repentance the Church has no reason to expect the world to act like those who are in the Kingdom of Heaven; why, because evil continues to beget evil.

So then what does the Church do in the mean time? Does it take authority and defend the righteous and the innocent, or does it take a pacifist position of non-resistance? Scripture, Tradition, history, and wisdom seem to support the legal defense of the faith and family life, but it does renounce wanton violence for personal gain. Nowhere in Ancient Jewish or Church history do we read that the People of God were to be passive and not defend their faith or people.

The people of God were to be vigilant and watchful. Attentive to the warning of the Watchman they were to work with both a tool and a sword near by. When the enemy came they fought valiantly trusting the Lord for the victory. In times of peace they did not look for trouble, but they continued to follow the commands of the Lord in an effort to worship God and provide for their families.

Not everyone has been called to be a Watchman for the whole Church, however each and every one of us has been called to be a Watchman over our families and self. As the hour grows closer to the times of increased trouble approaching, may we learn to trust the Lord more dearly, pray more fervently, and not be afraid to stand firm on the promises of God; and when necessary to speak out for righteousness and confront evil in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hence, we pray for Divine grace, mercy, and protection in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.