

Homily for the 23rd Sunday of the Year, September 6th 2020

Recently a friend told me how he had asked a group of youngsters to keep a safe distance from him, presuming that they would respond positively. Instead he got a barrage of abuse leaving him both angry and uncomfortable, asking himself would it have been better to have said nothing. This incident came to mind when reflecting on today's readings asking myself how often do I turn a blind eye, or say to myself it doesn't concern me? It might be seeing someone drop litter in the street or something far more important and I do nothing. Ezekiel would not have approved as we have just heard: If you do not warn the wicked man to renounce his evil ways, he will die and you will be responsible for his death. That is pretty stark however we try to dress it up. Then Ezekiel goes on, if we do warn the wicked man and he does not repent than he will die but we will have saved our lives. There is no getting away from the fact that we do have a responsibility for unmasking wrongdoing.

As we know the first reading is always chosen to link in with the Gospel which today sees Jesus addressing the crucial issue of what to do when someone within the community does something wrong. As with the first reading Jesus puts the emphasis on the importance of not turning a blind eye but of doing something about it. Interestingly the initiative is given to the one who has been wronged rather than the wrongdoer. How often would we put it the other way round, namely thinking that the perpetrator should take the initiative in seeking forgiveness, thinking he/she owes me an apology. Jesus then gives a clear pattern of how to continue. The first stage is between the two people themselves, hopefully through dialogue and honesty the situation can be resolved. If that doesn't happen then there is a second stage where one or two others are brought into the process. Just as an aside towards the end of the passage Jesus says where two or three are gathered he is with them. This saying is usually linked to two or three people praying together, but if we include the present situation of conflict resolution, it broadens the idea of Jesus' presence among us considerably. Worth thinking about. If this doesn't work then we move to the third stage which involves the whole community/church. Now, for the first time, we are told what happens if the wrongdoer does not acknowledge the wrong, it leads to expulsion, reminding us that not all disputes, either individual or collective will end in agreement. Indeed there will be occasions when it is better to walk away rather than cause worse damage.

The emphasis this week is on resolving conflict which is a live issue in our world today. One thing is for sure that when dialogue stops, polarization takes place often leading to violence, tragically sometimes on a large scale. When politicians become increasingly confrontational, or those seeking election descend to blame and counter blame, the exposing of wider wrongs like poverty, inequality, racism, the denial of human rights, trafficking, modern day slavery, the abuse of power, can take second place to personal ambition. Neither Ezekiel nor Jesus would condone this just as they would oppose our refusal to accept our own personal responsibility for unmasking such evils and working for the ongoing transformation of our world.

Bidding Prayers for the 19th Sunday of the Year

Celebrant:

Let us pray on behalf of the Church family and the human family, for our God never passes us by, but rather draws near in sunshine and storm.

Reader:

For all who bear the name of Christ, especially those suffering persecution – that they may not grow discouraged by wind and wave, but rather take heart in Jesus who abides with us and has walked the way before us.

Lord in your mercy

For the leaders of nations as well as those who promote terror and violence – that their hearts may be transformed to work unceasingly for a world in which justice and peace shall kiss.

Lord in your mercy

For the peoples of the earth – that they may never know again the horror of weapons of mass destruction whether they be nuclear, chemical, biological or other.

Lord in your mercy

For those researching for a vaccine for the coronavirus – that their efforts will be rewarded and the spread of the virus be curtailed.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the coronavirus, for John Hume the architect of peace in Northern Ireland and May Huston, Peggy Woodcock, Margaret Gowdrige, Arthur Somerville and Jack Rodgers whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord hear us

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

God of love, help us to listen ever more attentively to your voice, and respond ever more willingly to your will. Be with us both in times of peace and times of turmoil and strife. Draw near to all who are in need. Through Christ our Lord. Amen