

23rd Sunday of the Year A

**First Reading** Ezekiel 33:7-9

The word of the Lord was addressed to me as follows, "Son of man, I have appointed you as sentry to the House of Israel. When you hear a word from my mouth, warn them in my name. If I say to a wicked man: Wicked wretch, you are to die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked man to renounce his ways, then he shall die for his sin, but I will hold you responsible for his death.

If, however, you do warn a wicked man to renounce his ways and repent, and he does not repent, then he shall die for his sin, but you yourself will have saved your life."

**Second Reading** Romans 13:8-10

Avoid getting into debt, except the debt of mutual love. If you love your fellow men you have carried out your obligations. All the commandments: You shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and so on, are summed up in this single command: You must love your neighbour as yourself. Love is the one thing that cannot hurt your neighbour; that is why it is the answer to every one of the commandments.

**Gospel** Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus said to his disciples: "If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother.

If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you: the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain any charge. But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community; and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a pagan or a tax collector.

I tell you solemnly, whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven. I tell you solemnly once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven.

For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them."

**Meditation**

There is a proverb: "The one who loves greatly suffers greatly." Today's gospel deals with mutual correction, the most painful obligation of love. What attitude must a community take toward one of its own who acts against the mind of the Church? The early Church was small: it was quite conscious of its impact as a community on society. "Behold how they love one another," was often quoted of them. Ecclesial unity was seen to be an integral aspect of this love. The Church born from divine love had to be a united body of love where each would be responsible for the faith and holiness of the others. What dimensions of Christian life gave rise to procedures for removing the roots of evil or misunderstanding among believers? In a wise progression, the Church utilizes prudence as well as patience. Because the Church always presumes that its members act under the impulse of the Spirit, each Christian stands under the obligation of mutual listening and dialogue.

In effect, the community cannot carry on as an ordinary tribunal which seeks the confession of the one who fails and which condemns the act. The Church goes beyond justice and acts from mercy in the hope of absolving and reconciling. Even if sinners persist in error, the Church prays for them.

Common prayer is a necessary aspect to the Church's communion. The effectiveness of prayer is determined by the harmony which reigns in the community because this harmony is a sign of Emmanuel interceding with the Church in its prayer. This justifies the Church's refusal to rush to anathema or excommunication and its conviction that responsibility toward one another is more powerful than resentment.