

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Sept. 6, 2020

Lights and sensors go off in our cars to warn us if we get off track. And yes, at times we all need warning when we have crossed the line. We need help time and again, like car sensors, to get us back on track. All of us need to be corrected at times for wrongs that we do, for things we have said, or perhaps we shouldn't have said. We need to be corrected, seek forgiveness and reconcile the hurts. And we also have had at times the task of correcting someone for his/her actions. Nobody enjoys having to tell a friend, family member, or co-worker that he/she has to correct their behavior. At times, it is necessary.

It is the responsibility of parents with their children, teachers with their students, coaches with their players, pastors with their flock, policeman with those who break the law, etc. to be the sensors in a way. And yes, if parents, teachers, coaches, pastors, policeman, etc. cross the line, then they too must face correction.

We have the Christian obligation to point out sinful or destructive actions or patterns. As Ezekiel challenges us in the First Reading, "*warn the wicked, trying to turn him from his way*". It is our prophetic call. When we are in a situation where we need to confront someone, Jesus gives us very practical guidelines for brotherly/sisterly correction in the Gospel. These guidelines are a helpful reminder to keep a spirit of Christian love. First of all, Jesus tells us to try to settle our differences directly with that person if at all possible, so to avoid misunderstanding and the damaging effects of gossip. Not to post it first on social media or Facebook like many do today. If there is no fruit there, Jesus suggests bringing a couple friends or family members to help with this, an intervention so to speak. Interventions are difficult, but necessary acts of love.

Reconciliation is our mission as Christians. And if we are to grow spiritually, we need to be reconciled with God and others in order for us to be ministers of reconciliation. We are challenged to grow as a people of real love, mature love, and sometimes, yes, tough love.

Going back to Ezekiel, he borrowed an image from war and its threat to national survival. He knows that a people under threat needs its sentries. The real threat that sentry, Ezekiel sees, is not an attack from without, but failure of the community from within, a breakdown that leads to death. The danger that he must warn about is the threat of sin. This warning of Ezekiel is not directed to the community as a whole, but to the individual within it. Once you hear the Sentinel warning, then you must act to set things right.

Individual responsibility is the prophet's message. When Ezekiel preached, he was a prisoner in enemy territory. He warned that the real enemy within is the real threat to life. That enemy is sin, the abandonment of God, His laws, His ordinances, and His ways. It is the prophetic role of the Church to continue this preaching.

This gospel calls us to true repentance. Christ brought the gift of reconciliation. One might develop this further by reflecting on how we as a community can be a sign of what we preach; a repentant community that has found the life and peace offered by Christ. But this takes true and authentic love in order to carry it out.

I attended a retreat at a religious community where on Fridays they practiced public confession. At a time after Prayer and Mass, they have a moment of quiet and anyone in the community can confess sins they have committed that has hurt the body of Christ. I always

wonder if a church community could do that, or even a family. It can only happen when there is love found in the midst.

Life can get messy at times. I have a journal book, and on the cover says, *Bless This Mess*. And this is what the Lord does over and over again, when we allow Him. It is not easy to correct anyone or to allow yourself to be corrected. But it is how we grow. Honestly, we do learn more through our faults and mistakes in the need of being corrected, than when our lives are going along in right order. Otherwise, how do we change and grow into the people we are called to be? Of course, both you and I know, there are times when the serious disagreements and broken relationships we experience can't be worked out in a short time. The hurts are too big and painful. Even in a long period of time, some relationships remain broken. The hope is that time does heal all wounds, but some wounds just need more time. You see, God is the ultimate authority when it comes to how we conduct our lives. And He, and He alone, is the Ultimate Sentinel, warning us as a people when we have crossed the line. God's sensors are going off; the world is not paying attention.

The truth is the process of correcting someone or ourselves for that matter ought to be an activity of love. And this isn't always easy. Christ commands us to love God and love neighbor. Again the Gospel reminds us of how complicated this can be. St. Paul is also very helpful in giving us a road map when it comes to correcting someone. St. Paul reminds us in the second reading that, "*Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law*" (Rom. 13:8-10). Yes, the task of correcting is about love.

Knowing how broken the world is and how broken we are, I would like to use St. Paul words to speak these over the church and voice these words to the world: "*If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.*" As you know, he concludes with, "*So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*" Love is the key, to living in fellowship, with each other. Paul reminds us today the only obligation that ultimately counts is the love we owe one another.

We are called to be a reconciled community so that we can be an effective sign in the world, the sign for healing. Because we know the world is broken, the church is broken, families are broken, people are broken, and they all need healing.

The guidelines for correcting and healing are before us today. The guide to follow the guidelines is with us today, the Holy Spirit, our Sentinel. He is calling out, the sensors are on, we (everyone) need to listen and obey, allow God's spirit to get back on the path to healing and peace. Once we listen, the church and the world will follow.