

## **Cycle A – Ordinary Time – Week 23 – Matthew 18:15-20**

In the secular world, many refer to this as Pumpkin Spice Season and while Pumpkin Spice has little to do with our liturgical seasons, our readings have everything to do not just with our Church lives, but also with our personal and work lives in the secular world!

The more I teach leadership and the more I study spirituality, it appears to me many of the great leadership ideas, have some basis in spirituality.

In our first reading God is telling Ezekiel, one of the prophets, he **must** instruct and correct the people of God to keep them safe.

Many of us might say, I am not a prophet, but au contraire, by nature of our baptisms we all are made prophets. Each of us received a gift from God, to share with others, the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Note – the first reading tells us if we don't share the Good News, we are the ones to blame. This applies in our secular lives as well. For example, if we know something, which would help someone, we should share it, just as we should share the Good News of the Gospel.

We all have excuses, but by our Baptism, each of us have been given supernatural gift of courage, to share the Truth with others.

Many leadership books start with this idea of being courageous – be bold – deal with the issue, don't sweep it under the rug.

Which brings us to our responsorial psalm, which instructs us on when to deal with the issue – “If you hear His voice, harden not your hearts.”

If we truly listen to our conscience and the Holy Spirit, we know the right thing to do. But, how many times do we fail to act? If knowing about a problem is a good thing, doing something about it, is even better. In fact, it is the only way we achieve change.

But, if we fail to act, and don't listen to our conscience and the Holy Spirit, and we continue to dwell on the problem, or worse yet, we gossip about the issue with others, we are causing much more harm, than good, to ourselves and others!

Which brings us to our second reading from St. Paul to the Romans.

Paul who knew the Jewish Law and that it could be summed up quite nicely in: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This definition of neighbor applies to anyone in need including, our enemies.

This sounds almost impossible, but remembering all things are possible through God – we should realize that through the help of the Holy Spirit – who pours Divine love into our hearts, it makes this almost impossible task actually possible.

Paul is instructing us, on how we should correct each other out of love.

So, when we go to someone for correction, it should **not** be out of superiority, or lording something over them, or a 'gotcha' mindset. But rather, image the love a parent has for a child, and how a mother corrects a child who gets too close to the street with busy traffic or too close to a hot stove. The mother does it from a place of love, rather than aggression.

So, when placed in a situation, where you know there is need for correction, bring it to the other person, out of wanting the best for them. **That** is what love is!

St. Paul teaches us, we are all part of the Body of Christ, the Church. So, if one member is causing a problem, it harms the whole Church. The only way to heal the Church, and its members, is to correct them from the perspective of love.

Love is not some feel good emotion, but truly doing everything to help others fulfill their potential, God created them to be. Being indifferent to

someone's moral fault, is not love. Rather it is just cowardly, self-protection.

Which brings us to our Gospel from Matthew. Jesus gives us a step-by-step process, on how to correct another – practical application can be found in the Church, family and work life. Jesus starts with private correction one-on-one. Whether it is self-destructive behavior or causing harm to others.

How many times in life, if we had started with this one-on-one approach would things have gone better? We are being taught to avoid gossip, which is quite the opposite of love.

When we correct someone in private, it gives the person time to mend their ways, without public embarrassment. If necessary, the second step is to take someone who cares, with us. In the secular world, this is like sitting down with a supervisor, or human resources. In the Church, it is taking someone who is known and trusted. At home it maybe another relative.

Today (Saturday) is the feast day of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who is known for wonderful quotes, we can use in our daily lives. She said: "If you judge people, you have not time to love them." The judging in this quote, should not be taken as an excuse not to correct - what Jesus and St. Teresa are telling us, is we must approach the correction from a standpoint of love, rather than putting someone in their place.

The final step is to tell the Church. At the time of the early Church, this would mean a small group, which might meet in someone's house.

This is **NOT** permission to put our disagreements on Facebook or Twitter, but rather that smallest, most intimate group of friends, who out of love, care so much for the other person, it requires intervention. Then and only then, Jesus, states to treat them as a Gentiles or tax collectors.

We should look to Jesus, for what that means. Jesus dined with tax collectors. He even healed Gentiles.

You might have heard it said – Hate the sin, not the sinner. Another way to think about it is - Love the sinner, not the sin.

We have a duty to convey the Truth about the Gospel, even in our worldly lives, especially when it affects someone's eternal salvation.

I genuinely love where this Gospel ends. It ends in prayer. Jesus is telling each one of us, when we gather, He is there with us. Recognizing He is here, we should remember to turn to Him for help, before we have these difficult conversations. When appropriate, we could even conclude our time, with the other person, in prayer.

The readings today, lay out a logical, proven process for many of the problems we face in life.

We should be confident:

- 1) We will know the need for it when we see it.
- 2) We are given the graces by our baptism, to be courageous to answer the call.
- 3) We should remember to stop and pray before we proceed.
- 4) We should always start small and only include others, as the need arises.
- 5) We should always refrain from gossip.

Then we return to prayer in thanksgiving, for the help of Holy Spirit, even if the issue is not solved – commending ourselves and the other person to God's grace.

/s/ Deacon John C. Harned, St. Francis of Assisi, September 5 & 6, 2020