**23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle A**

September 6/7, 2014

Ez 13: 8-10; Rom 13: 8-10; Mt 18: 15-20

We are in this together, this which we call life and the Church. We are in this together, yet we hear ringing in our ears a lot of familiar attitudes, sayings such as “It’s none of my business!” or “Live and let live” or “It is a private matter and I have no reason to oppose it” or “It is happening on the other side of the world. We don’t have to get involved.”

Yes, my friends, we are in this together, not just as individuals. Yes, as Americans, we value our individual liberties and freedoms, and we are reluctant to place the common good of all people over and above our individual cares and concerns. We are reluctant to see how we are responsible for each other.

Yet, we are in this together, this which we call life; this which we call the Church. We are one body, one parish, one Church. We *are* responsible for one another. What you do affects me and all of us around you. What I do affects you and all those around me. What we do here, in this parish, affects the broader community in which this parish exists. What we must do as a Church affects the entire world.

Sounds like a lot of responsibility, doesn’t it? Well, it is. That is one reason why being a Catholic can be very challenging. We must live our lives with the full knowledge that we are responsible for each other in every way. I may not bear the guilt of your sin, nor you mine, but I must bear your needs, as you must bear mine.

In other words, we must love one another as St. Paul tells us in our first reading today, and as our Lord tells us so often in the Gospels.

So many people love that scripture passage, “Love your neighbor as yourself” and so they should. I ask you, though, what you think are the implications and obligations of such a commandment.

"Love your neighbor as yourself" so often get diluted down into some sort of permissive attitude. Something like, “If they are good people, that’s all that matters. What they do or how they live is ultimately of no account. Just be a good person, and it won’t matter what you believe, or what religion you practice, or what sins you commit.”

I would say to you that is not what the love your neighbor commandment means.

Our first reading and the Gospel today are clear. There are times and places when we must call each other into account. There are times when we must do so, not to beat someone down in anger, not to castigate or humiliate, but call into account in love and to do so when someone is playing around with evil, playing with something dangerous in their lives, because to love means we assist each other to avoid evil, to help each other out of patterns of life that pull us away from God, goodness and the Church, out of sinful patterns in life that draw us into darkness, confusion, vice, and isolation.

We are in this together, so Christian love demands at times Christian correction. Remember, it is out of love, not hatred, not vengeance, not spite that we do so, but out of love.

The early Christians understood this and lived this in a very simple, loving, and effective way. The Church today continues to live this way. Two thousand years ago the sense of mutual responsibility for each other, the need for fraternal correction, was easily understood and accepted. The Christian community was central to their lives and the people were invested and committed to the Church. In 2014, cultural values have changed and we are more concerned about ourselves and not involving ourselves “in other people’s business.”

Don’t be nosey, but be loving. Don’t be condemning, but be faithful to the truth. Don’t be nagging, but be concerned and speak out to others of your concerns for a brother or sister in Christ.

Each of us, especially we the clergy – deacons, priests, and bishops – as well as you the laity, needs to examine our consciences and ask ourselves whether we are living only for our own well-being or whether we are living for others; whether we are excusing ourselves from the responsibilities we have to speak the truth, to approach each other in a spirit of love and correction, to recognize that when someone is on the fringes, vulnerable and misled we must pull him in, support him and show him again the path of light, truth, love, i.e., the path of Jesus Christ and the Church.

We the clergy must live, not in self-concern but in love for you. To do this, despite our sins, we must speak the truth who is Jesus Christ. And you, my dear people of God, must do the same for us.