

Homily of Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, 2026

Ezekiel 33:7-9; Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9; Romans 13:13:8-10; Matthew 18:15-20

The people of Israel's disloyalty to God resulted in their conquest and captivity by Babylon. While in exile in Babylon, God did not abandon them. God called one of them, Ezekiel, to prophesy to them. In the first reading, God spoke to Ezekiel, "I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel..."

In the same way, God has appointed each one of us to watch over one another and to be one another's keeper. Priests are appointed to watch over the faithful and the faithful are to watch over their priests. Family members are appointed to watch over one another. Neighbors are appointed to watch over one another. Church members, coworkers, business partners, colleagues, and so on are appointed to watch over one another. We are not appointed to fight and destroy one another. Rulers and leaders are appointed to watch over the citizens; not neglect them, or mistreat them, or abandon them, or steal what belongs to them, or kill them. No one should be like Cain who murdered his brother and questioned God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9).

God called Ezekiel to speak truth to his people to save them. In the same way, God calls us to speak truth to one another to save one another. God says in the first reading, "If you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I shall require from your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity, but you will have saved your life." St. James writes, "Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:20). Therefore, God has not called us to rumor or to gossip or to slander or to be silent in the face of evil.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, "Silence in the face of evil is evil: God will not hold us guiltless." Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor and theologian who was executed for his role in the political resistance against Adolf Hitler. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated that remaining silent in the face of wrongdoing makes a person cooperative with evil and that the inaction of good people is a greater tragedy than the acts of bad people. He was equally executed.

While we are challenged to speak truth to one another, we are also challenged to accept the truth we hear and not harden our hearts or shoot the messenger. Some people are like the guilty Hebrew man who attacked Moses for correcting him, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us?" (Exodus 2:14).

Watching over one another and speaking truth to one another are acts of love. That is why St. Paul writes in the second reading, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another... hence, love is the fulfilment of the law" (Romans 13:8-10). St. Jerome recorded that St. John, the evangelist, lived to about 100 years old. He became so frail and weak that he could no longer walk and had to be carried by his disciples into the gatherings of believers in Ephesus. Because he lacked the strength for long or complex preaching, he would simply address the church with the same words every week: "Little children, love one another." Growing weary of hearing the exact same

phrase week after week, the disciples finally asked him, “Master, why do you always say this?” St. John replied, “Because it is the Lord's command, and if this only is done, it is enough.”

In today's gospel, Jesus presents to us a difficult and a radical act of love, which is to make humbling personal extra efforts to seek reconciliation. St. Paul refers to this spiritual maturity as “becoming a fool for Christ” (1 Corinthians 4:10). It takes prayer and God's graces of humility, courage, and perseverance to follow the four steps of seeking reconciliation which Jesus commands: Step one: Don't presume, don't rumor, don't gossip, don't grudge, don't malign, don't slander, don't conclude. Initiate a private meeting for reconciliation. If the private meeting fails, don't give up, proceed to step two: Make a second attempt with one or two mediators. If the second attempt fails, still don't give up, proceed to step three: Bring the matter to the leadership or the community. After these three steps and the person still refuses reconciliation, then step four: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). This means that we do not fight or retaliate against someone who remains unreconciled. We are to pray for the person and treat the person with empathy.

Jesus continues in today's gospel, “Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:18-20).

Prophet Amos asks, “Do two journey together unless they have agreed?” (Amos 3:3). The answer is, “No.” Therefore, let us be in agreement and journey together and watch over one another. Then, there will be the positive energy of doing things together, praying together, and binding and loosing in Jesus' name, and we will experience his presence in our midst. The psalmist exclaims, “How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! ... For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore” (Psalm 133:1-3).

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