

September 06, 2020
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Ez 33:7-9
Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9
Rom 13:8-10
Mt 18:15-20

RESTORING BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS!

In one of the popular *Chicken Soup* volumes, Dennis E. Mannering tells about an assignment he once gave to a class he teaches for adults. He gave them the assignment, **"Go to someone you love, and tell them that you love them."**

At the beginning of the next class, one of the students began by saying, **"I was angry with you last week when you gave us this assignment. I didn't feel I had anyone to say those words to. But as I began driving home my conscience started talking. Then I knew exactly who I needed to say 'I love you' to."**

Five years ago, my father and I had a vicious disagreement and never really resolved it. We avoided seeing each other unless we absolutely had to at family gatherings. We hardly spoke. So by the time I got home, I had convinced myself I was going to tell my father I loved him. Just making that decision seemed to lift a heavy load off my chest. At 5:30, I was at my parents' house ringing the doorbell, praying that Dad would answer the door. I was afraid if Mom answered, I would chicken out and tell her instead. But as luck would have it, Dad did answer the door. I didn't waste any time. I took one step in the door and said, 'Dad, I just came over to tell you that I love you.' It was as if a transformation came over my dad. Before my eyes his face softened, the wrinkles seemed to disappear, and he began to cry. He reached out. But that's not even my point. Two days after that visit, my dad had a heart attack. So my message to all of you is this: Don't wait to do the things you know need to be done. What if I had waited to tell my dad? Take the time to do what you need to do and do it now!" (*"Do It Now!" Condensed Chicken Soup for Souls, Copyright 1996 by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen & Patty Hansen.*). What a beautiful story of broken relationship restored!

Do we have relationships needing to be restored? What are the methods we are doing to mend it? If we are not doing any steps to restore it, does it mean that we are already comfortable tolerating broken relationships? Are we at ease taking the easy road of resentment, ill-will and unwillingness to forgive control our hearts?

In our gospel proclaimed today Jesus offers us how to mend broken relationships. He conveys to us that the **first step** is to speak directly but privately to the individual who have wronged us. If it does not work, the **second step** is to bring another person, who is wise and impartial/unbiased, to help the offender to see the wrong and be reconciled. If this second step fails too, there is a **third step** to take, that is, to seek the help of the Christian community, the Church. The reason and goal for asking the help of others is to restore broken relationship grounded on Christian love and wisdom. If after all the interventions of others including the

Church collapse, Jesus appears to tell us that we have the right to end/terminate the relationship with the unbending/adamant/immovable fellow. However, prayers must continue for the fellow's enlightenment.

The steps recommended by Jesus in restoring broken relationship demonstrate to us that we have the responsibility to help the offender recognize his or her mistakes. Even though we are the offended party we have the responsibility to assist the wrongdoer see the light and love of Jesus Christ. Hence, in pointing out the wrongdoing committed, we have to do it in a Christ-like manner – full of forgiveness and love.

St. Paul, in our 2nd reading, reminds us that all our efforts, even in mending broken relationships, must be done in the spirit of love. It must not be motivated resentment or revenge. **Why it must not be done in a spirit retaliation?** It is simply because it is not Christ-like. It is also detrimental/harmful in building up the community. St. Paul says, **"Love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."**

Prophet Ezekiel, in our 1st reading, is given the responsibility to proclaim God's word, to challenge the people and correct their mistakes. He is sent for the good of others. The Lord God says that if he does his responsibility and the people do not listen, then they are responsible for their death. He will save his life. On the other hand, if he will not do his responsibility and they die, he will be liable for their death.

Just as Prophet Ezekiel is appointed watchman over the house of Israel, given the responsibility to correct their mistakes in order to be saved, so too our Lord Jesus is giving us the responsibility to help each other change our sinful ways and be agents of mending broken relationships. Our Lord Jesus calls us, whether we are the offended party or the offender, to start restoring broken relationships in the family, in the workplace, and even, in the Church.

We know that responding to his call to mend broken relationship is easier said than done. For this reason, we ask for his grace - **actually three graces** – for us to carry out his call.

- **First**, if we are the offended party, we need the **grace of forgiveness**. Without his grace, we will only think of getting even.
- **Second**, if we are the offender, we need the **grace of humility** in admitting our sin committed. Without his grace, we will remain adamant/resistant in acknowledging our faults.
- **Third**, for both the offended and the offender, we need the **grace of courage** to face each other and bring God's healing love and wisdom in restoring damaged relationships. Without his grace, we will fall into snubbing/discounting each other as human beings.

Lord Jesus, please give us the gifts of forgiveness, humility, and courage so we can truly respond to your call of restoring our broken relationships. Amen.