

23 OT Year A Readings and Commentary

Commentary by Dale J. Sieverding: The prophet Ezekiel is charged to make the nation aware of their shortcomings, lest they die. The prophet is warned that should he not make known Israel's sins to the people, they will die, but his life will likewise be required of him. If the "wicked" are warned and do not repent, they will perish, however, the prophet will live.

The selection from Paul's Letter to the Romans lists a number of the commandments from the Decalogue, yet sums them up with one of the "greatest" commandments, to love your neighbor as you love yourself. In the epistle, Paul is reflecting on the place of the law in the Christian life. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law, and Christians are charged to "love" as this is the epitome of living a life of faithfulness.

Matthew's Gospel provides a periscope on church discipline. If a member of the body needs correction, first you can approach him privately, if this does not work, then you are charged to bring witnesses. If the person in the wrong, does not listen, then the entire Church is to be involved in trying to set the "brother" who sinned on the right path. If all else fails, the person is to be treated as an outsider and basically excommunicated from the church. Apologetics will use the conclusion of today's Gospel to provide a foundation for the sacrament of confession. The Church is granted the power and charge of reconciliation. In conclusion, the promise is given that where "two or three are gathered in my name", I will be present in their midst. This is a testament to the proximate presence of Christ that the early community experienced when gathered in prayer.

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Lectionary Summary: Glenn CJ Byer: The prophet Ezekiel is charged to make the nation aware of their shortcomings, lest they die. The prophet is warned that should he not make known Israel's sins to the people, they will die, but his life will likewise be required of him. If the "wicked" are warned and do not repent, they will perish, however, the prophet will live. The selection from Paul's Letter to the Romans lists a number of the commandments from the Decalogue, yet sums them up with one of the "greatest" commandments, to love your neighbor as you love yourself. In the epistle, Paul is reflecting on the place of the law in the Christian life. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law, and Christians are charged to "love" as this is the epitome of living a life of faithfulness. Matthew's Gospel provides a periscope on church discipline. If a member of the body needs correction, first you can

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First Reading Ezekiel 33:7-9

If you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way, I will hold you responsible for his death.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel

Thus says the LORD:

You, son of man, I have appointed watchman for the house of Israel; when you hear me say anything, you shall warn them for me.

If I tell the wicked, "O wicked one, you shall surely die, " and you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way, the wicked shall die for his guilt, but I will hold you responsible for his death.

But if you warn the wicked, trying to turn him from his way, and he refuses to turn from his way, he shall die for his guilt, but you shall save yourself.

The word of the Lord

Commentary Ezekiel 33:7-9 by Deacon Owen Cummings: St. Matthew's gospel reading today has Jesus speak to the disciples about fraternal responsibility. The passage from the prophet Ezekiel anticipates this. Ezekiel is described as a "watchman" for the house of Israel. In the major walled cities of the ancient near east, especially in a time of war, the watchman was the one who kept watch, who was the look-out for the enemy's approach. Having spotted the enemy army approaching, he could then warn the military and the citizens and they would not be overcome. They would be prepared. Ezekiel is

to be God's watchman, but there is a difference. He is to warn the wicked to turn from their evil ways. If he does not do this, the watchman himself will be held responsible for the death of the wicked. Of course, there are different ways of inviting conversion, for that is surely what is meant by "warning the wicked." There may indeed be some occasions when personal confrontation of wickedness is called for, but it seems to me that the norm ought to be solid but compassionate moral performance on the part of watchmen, that is to say, of all who are Church. Fraternal responsibility by way of correction is always a most delicate matter, since those who would issue such correction are flawed themselves.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

✠(8) If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;
let us acclaim the rock of our salvation.
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

Come, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the LORD who made us.
For he is our God,
and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.

Oh, that today you would hear his voice:
"Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as in the day of Massah in the desert,
where your fathers tempted me;
they tested me though they had seen my works."

Commentary: **Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9** by John Paul Heil: Main Theme: LISTEN to what God may be saying to us TODAY.

This exuberant hymn is appropriately sung by pilgrims streaming into the Jerusalem temple, the place of God's special presence, to worship the God of creation and salvation with joy and thanksgiving. The invitation to acclaim God as the "rock" of our salvation acknowledges God as the ultimate origin and ever-present place of our protection,

safety, and security. It also recalls the "rock" that God commanded Moses to strike with his staff so that water will flow from it for God's chosen people of Israel, wandering and grumbling in the arid wilderness, to drink for their life and salvation (see today's First Reading).

The psalm passionately urges us to hear the voice of God speaking to us today. We are not to "harden" our hearts and thus close our ears to the ways God may be speaking to us, as did our Israelite ancestors in the desert. At Meribah ("contention" or "strife") in the day of Massah ("testing") they rebelliously quarreled against and "tested" God, questioning his saving presence with them, even though God had miraculously provided them with life-giving water (First Reading). Are we failing to see the ways that God's saving presence is with us today? How may God be speaking to us today in these scriptures, in the events of our times, in our personal lives?

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Second Reading Romans 13:8-10

Love is the fulfillment of the law.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:

Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another;

for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery;

you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,"

and whatever other commandment there may be,

are summed up in this saying, namely,

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Love does no evil to the neighbor;

hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.

The word of the Lord

Commentary Romans 13:8-10 by Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB: Paul has just finished instructing the Christians of Rome to pay taxes to whom taxes are due (Rom 13:6-7). This provides a lead in for a reflection on Christian love (Rom 13:8-10). Modern readers have trouble seeing the connection between the two. This is due largely to our understanding of love as a private feeling. For Paul love is a

concrete good which gets manifested in fulfilling Torah, summarized here in the commandments.

Paul admonishes Christians not to be in debt to anyone for anything. All just debts should be paid promptly and in full. There is, however, one exception. That is the debt of loving one another. The nature of our debt to love one another can never be paid in full. There is no time when we can say that we have given others enough love and therefore we can cease loving. Even though Christ has come, our obligation to fulfill the Torah has not ceased. In fact Jesus' mandate to love God and to love others as oneself summarizes what it means to fulfill the commandments of God.

Paul's statement that "Love does no wrong to a neighbor..." is not urging Christians to passivity. Fulfilling the law is not merely a matter of not doing. It is an on-going activity that in fact has no end. We are always in process of fulfilling the law. We are always in the process of loving others. We are always in the process of loving others as ourselves. This obligation to love is our one debt that will never be fulfilled

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Gospel Acclamation 2 Corinthians 5:19

℟ Alleluia, alleluia.

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Gospel Matthew 18:15-20

If your brother or sister listens to you, you have won them over.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Jesus said to his disciples:

"If your brother sins against you,
go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.
If he listens to you, you have won over your brother.
If he does not listen,
take one or two others along with you,
so that every fact may be established

on the testimony of two or three witnesses.'
If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church.
If he refuses to listen even to the church,
then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.
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."

The Gospel of the Lord

Lectionary for Mass in the Dioceses of the United States of America, volume I Copyright © 1970, 1997, 1998 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Commentary: Matthew 18:15-20 by Virginia Smith: Chapter 18 constitutes the fourth of five sermons the author of the Gospel of Matthew constructs. Often called the Community Discourse or the Sermon on the Church, it consists of a number of rather dissimilar ethical teachings on ways to deal with the ups and downs of community life. The material contained in today's excerpt is largely exclusive to Matthew.

The two parts of today's reading seem at first glance to be diametric opposites, but upon closer inspection one follows logically upon the other. The reading opens with instructions on how to handle serious disputes among members of the church. By and large, 'church' in this context indicates the local community. Only in the most significant cases would the situation be referred further. If all else fails, the person offended is allowed to shun the offender ("*...treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector,*"), a terrible fate.

However, in the very next verse, provisions for forgiveness are laid out so broadly that the choice to forgive is not only binding between the parties involved here on earth, but in heaven as well. In Jesus preaching, here and elsewhere, the only thing that trumps forgiveness is love. That actually is an oxymoron because forgiveness is a major component of Christian love.

What does all this say to us now? We don't need to be patsies and allow people to run over us roughshod, but we may not carry grudges nor seek vengeance for wrongs done to us even if our complaint is legitimate. The most Christian way to respond is through forgiveness, a decision we make, not an emotion we feel.

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