

Homily Outline for the 23rd Sunday of the Year – Cycle A
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
September 6, 2020

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- I. Policies and procedures for fraternal correction.
 - A. With my background in canon law and civil, much of my work as Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Chicago and as Bishop of Springfield in Illinois has focused on writing policies and procedures.
 1. Over the years, I have often thought that the passage from today's Gospel (Mt 18:15-20) is basically Jesus giving us policies and procedures for fraternal correction.
 - a. He gives us policies establishing the principle that wrongdoing should be confronted.
 - b. He gives a 3-step grievance procedure for trying to work things out.
 - c. He also prescribes the penalty if the offender fails to reform: "treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector," i.e., excommunication.
 2. To this day, we have this tension between mercy and justice.
 - a. Jesus called tax collectors and sinners to follow him.
 - b. But He also told them to reform their ways and sin no more.
 - B. In our Church today, we call sinners to reform their ways and sin no more, but we must also pay attention to the penalties for failing to do so.
 1. The practice in the Prelature of Opus Dei is to ask permission of your spiritual director before correcting someone.
 2. This safeguard protects against becoming too arrogant and self-righteous.
- II. Today's first reading from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel (Ez 33:7-9) also speaks of the importance of fraternal correction.

- A. The context is that news will reach the Jewish exiles in Babylon that the great city of Jerusalem has fallen.
- B. The prophet has given many warnings that such a terrible thing will happen, but the people still refused to heed his words.
- C. God reminds Ezekiel that he has the great responsibility of serving as a watchman over the people.
 - 1. Watchman is an especially appropriate title for a prophet. Like a watchman in a tower, Ezekiel has a commanding view of any approaching danger.
 - 2. In his case the danger is a spiritual one. Because he serves the court of heaven, Ezekiel is fully aware of the consequences that will follow if the people remain unfaithful to their covenant with God.
 - 3. It is his responsibility to sound the alarm, giving the people plenty of time to realize the danger and change their ways.
- D. At this point in Ezekiel's service to God, it seems unlikely that the people will turn away from idolatry.
 - 1. All the emphasis falls on death; they will die for their guilt.
 - 2. Yet even though this sad outcome is becoming more and more probable, Ezekiel must still continue sounding the alarm.
 - 3. The people may die for ignoring his word, but Ezekiel will have faithfully carried out the task God has given him.
 - 4. The rest is up to those to whom he gave warning.

III. In the Gospel, Jesus talks about how He is in the midst where two or three gather in His name.

A. This is a clear reference to the Church.

- 1. In fact, this passage from St. Matthew's Gospel is the only place in the four Gospels where the word "church" is used.
- 2. "Church" comes from the Greek word *ekklēsia*, which means the assembly or congregation called out by God.

3. The Church is not just where two or three people gather, but when they do so in His name.
- B. This is why coming to church for Mass is so important.
1. Jesus wants us to come together, to gather in His name, not just pray privately and individually.
 2. This also has implications for family life.
 - a. When families gather in Christ's name, we call that the "domestic Church."
 - b. Families should say the rosary together, pray together before meals, and come to church together, as much as possible.
- IV. Finally, St. Paul says to us today in our second reading that "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10).
- A. This is the basis of my episcopal motto, *Lex cordis caritas*, Latin for "The Law of the Heart is Love."
 - B. I composed this motto by combining St. Paul's statement that that "love is the fulfillment of the law" with the words of the prophet Jeremiah, who wrote that God will make a new covenant with the people after they had gone astray, saying, "I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33).
 - C. God has written a law on our hearts, and that law of the heart is love.
- V. May God give us this grace. Amen.