

Twenty Third Sunday of Ordinary Time
Ez. 33.7-9, Rom. 13. 8-10, Mt. 18. 15-20

St. Matthew is well educated and a wonderful writer. He is a very deliberate and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he lays out Jesus' direction and purpose. During these past two weeks Jesus is preparing the Apostles for His departure. Remember two weeks ago Jesus asked the Apostles who people said he was, followed by the question, "who do you say I am." Peter responds correctly, Jesus says, "you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build **my church** (16.18). I give you the **keys** to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven, (Mt.16.20). Jesus looking forward is laying the foundation of the Church in which Jesus is the cornerstone, now He established Peter as Pope. The **keys** are a symbol of Peter's authority while the King (Jesus) is gone.

We all can agree that only God can forgive sins. This was the Pharisees and Sadducee's argument thus their disdain for Jesus whom they thought was only proclaiming to be God. Jesus knows His passion and death are coming soon. So, He is organizing the Church and its future. Peter and only Peter at this point is given the authority to forgive sins.

St. Matthew continues, (last week's Gospel), where Jesus describes the type of death He will face in Jerusalem, from who, and that **on "the third day he will rise again"**(v.22). Jesus tells the Apostles and us that we too must carry our cross. So this brings us to today's readings.

The Prophet Ezekiel as "watchman" to warn, guide, and direct the people of Israel toward a strong and faithful relationship with God. Notice that God is going to hold Ezekiel accountable, if he does not warn the wicked to change his ways Ezekiel will be held responsible for the wicked man's death. The Prophet Ezekiel is told that if he does warn them and they fail to return to God they will die for their guilt but he shall be saved. The goal is no different today than during Ezekiel's time, that is, moving sinners to repentance and conversion. We are all called to evangelize. It is first and foremost by living our faith that we become examples to others, through prayer and evangelization we too can lead others to convert and build a healthy relationship with God.

The key to this relationship is love! St. Paul points out that "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Rom. 13.9). As Father said last week this is part of our cross to carry. To love our neighbor, which can be difficult. Because we are human and have freewill, we will fall short. Hence the need for forgiveness. We need forgiveness to strengthen our ability to love.

In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us the direction to basic problem solving. But we must remember Jesus has directed us to **listen to His Word and Act on it.** Jesus speaks in progressive problem solving technique. First if you have a problem with somebody go and talk to them. Don't let it fester and grow. In today's world with all our technology sometimes I wonder if we still know how to speak and communicate with one another. Sometimes people may not know they offended you, so speak to them.

Next, Jesus says bring two or three "witnesses" with you. We would refer to this as a mediator, referee or perhaps a counselor. If that fails go to the Church. Our Priests can guide us through difficult situations and guide us to help resolve faults. Jesus uses the word "Amen." The word Amen means truly, so be it, or I do believe.

Jesus continues in the development of the Church as he now gives the rest of the Apostles the ability to forgive sins and hence the Church, the Church through our priests down to today. When Jesus establishes the Church, he does by establishing the sacraments of the Church. Today's Gospel is about forgiveness of sins. St. Matthew has laid out in his writings how Jesus established the church and in His absence the forgiveness of sin.

I think we need to take heed to the end of the Gospel where Jesus says, "Amen, 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 (v.20)" As we gather together for the celebration of Mass, **the greatest prayer of all**, we gather to pray for all our intentions. When someone within our Parish family is hurting or needs something we gather in prayer, we gather to support one another because we are a family.

My friends in Christ let us use our Sacraments to grow in Love of God and Neighbor. Let us devoutly pray for one another. As we grow in Love, faith and hope the Church grows in its love and need for God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit!!