

23rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – A; Sept. 3rd 2023
Ezekiel 33:7-9; Romans 13:8-10; Matthew 18:15-20

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

Today's readings invite us to review our *I-don't-care* attitude towards the fallen and lax members of the Church. It is a sensitive thing to tell somebody, *'you are wrong or you need to correct.'* Some people keep a very indifferent attitude towards the failing people. They think that it is none of their business to interfere in somebody's personal life; it is his/her problem. The worse tendency we see in some is that they go on exposing the shortcomings of people in their friends' circle, but never tell the person concerned. There is the third category of people who are very prompt in finding fault with others and they approach the person with their destructive criticisms which never help the person concerned either; rather destroy his/her life. **They condemn the wrong doer rather than the wrong doing.** None of the above attitudes will help the person to repair his/her life.

In the Book Genesis, to the question of God to Cain, **'Where is your brother Abel?' Cain answered 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?'** (Gen.4:9). Through today's first reading and the gospel passage God makes it very clear that we are indeed the keepers of our brothers and sisters. In the first reading God warns Prophet Ezekiel against his possible leniency or hesitation to correct the wicked people in the community of Israel. The failure from the part of the Prophet would bring condemnation of God against him. But despite his warning and correction, if the wicked continued with wicked life, he would be held responsible for his death, not the Prophet.

In today's gospel Jesus makes it very clear that as Christians, we have duty over **our brothers or sisters**. Christian community is a big family and as we belong to that, we are brothers and sisters. There are all sorts of people in the community especially there are weaker ones who are vulnerable to evils and temptations. They are unable to survive without the support of the stronger ones; they cannot come out of their failures by themselves unless somebody gives them a hand. ***In their failures and shortcomings what they need is not the destructive criticisms or condemnation rather our encouragement and support for change and growth.*** They need our corrections but with benevolence. They may be our own family members or outsiders of our families, but our correction or admonition should have only one intention which *should be the good of the weaker ones.*

As we have heard in the gospel, Jesus is very cautious not to offend anyone or hurt somebody's feelings. So he gives us different steps to approach somebody who does something wrong. As a first step he suggests the one to one personal talk instead of exposing the issue in public. Very often this method helps a lot. If that fails, then I should call one or more to support my effort. In the third step it is advised to seek the help of the Church. *We should give up our effort only as a last resort. But we should never give up our prayer for the person, as prayer can do more than what we can achieve through our words and deeds.* If we go through the life of Jesus we see him using different methods to bring back fallen people. He admonished, corrected and advised his disciples and people. ***But one thing is very clear that he never condemned a person who failed; rather only his acts.*** Last Sunday, in the gospel we heard Jesus admonishing and correcting Peter saying, *"Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me."* Here Jesus was condemning the wrong attitude of Peter against Jesus' suffering and death. But at the courtyard of the high priest when Peter denied Jesus three times, according to Luke, Jesus turned and looked at him sadly. Peter got the message and he went out and wept. And that was some sort of correction. With the prostitute woman Jesus took a different approach. Instead of condemning her, which she really expected, he said to her, **"Nor do I condemn you, go, sin no more."** She too got the message and changed her life style. He applied a different tactics to convert Zacchaeus, the tax collector. The expression of Jesus the desire to stay in the house of Zacchaeus, a public sinner, was a great honor for him and the kind gesture of Jesus changed his entire life. Here we don't find Jesus questioning him about his unjust tax collection or corruption. The loving approach of Jesus made the sinner a new man. Similarly, we to have to use different

methods to bring somebody back. Sometimes, a short visit, a phone call, sending a greeting card, when it is done at the right moment can make big difference in somebody's life positively. But we should remember, one unkind word coming out of our mouth can drive somebody away from God and Church forever.