

TRINITY 13 – 2020

Ezek 33:7-9

Rom 13:8-10

Mt 18:15-20

Today's readings are guidelines for God's people concerning how they should live together as God's family. Ezekiel urged his people to see him as God's watchman. In times of war the watchman stood on the city wall and warned the inhabitants of an impending attack from the enemy. Those who ignored the call to prepare and were killed were responsible for their actions. If the watchman did not issue a warning and people were killed, he was responsible for their deaths and accountable to God. Ezekiel said his instructions from God were that he should warn the people of the consequences of abandoning the worship of God and his laws. If people ignored Ezekiel's warning and do not change their ways, they are responsible for the consequences. If Ezekiel fails to give the warning and people do not repent, then he is accountable to God. Warning of the consequences of sinfulness is a role of the prophets.

The gospel reading spells out what the underlying principle must be within a Christian faith community regarding the resolution of disputes between members. The Jewish practice was that if there were no witnesses to a dispute the one who has been wronged must confront the offender on the day of the dispute together with others so that the matter could be resolved in court. Jewish convictions could only be secured if there were reliable witnesses. Jesus' approach is different in that the offended should approach the offender in a spirit of reconciliation rather than one to begin a legal process. The idea is that the two people involved try to sort the issue out quietly and lovingly. If this is not successful, then the offended party tries again in the presence of others who could increase the moral pressure for a resolution to be achieved.

The initiative for a reconciliation attempt must come from the one who has been offended. There is no room for the offended to sit back in self-righteous indignation waiting for the offender to apologise. The aim is reconciliation not retribution. If all else fails, the last resort is to involve the whole community and if they can't exert enough moral pressure, the offender is to be excommunicated. The Church has authority to bind and loose. In other words it has authority to judge on what is sinful and what isn't. It has no authority to judge a person, that is the prerogative of God alone.

Christian faith community members must care for and watch over each other because we are members of God's family and not simply individuals in a relationship with God. Jesus gathered together a community and our personal relationship with God must be guided by the relationship that exists between the Church and God. In St Matthew's time the fledgling Christian communities had to band together because they needed security in a hostile world. In 2020. We in the Western world are in this same position and so a faith community that believes the gospel and cares for its members will grow. The clergy must provide the stimulus but growth comes through the laity.

In this gospel reading there is a statement of Jesus' that is commonly misunderstood. It is, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I shall be there with them."

Jesus promised to be present to those who gather to arbitrate in disputes, not to give comfort to small numbers who gather for a meeting.

The Church arbitrates on sinfulness. It does not judge the person. Not all sinful actions are illegal and not all illegal actions are sinful. For instance, Abortion, euthanasia etc are sinful but not illegal, while increasingly freedom of speech is deemed to be illegal but is not sinful. This underlying reality confuses people about the Church who wonder why the Church regards some human behaviours as sinful but will support and care for those who are suffering the consequences of their sinful actions.

The final words in Canon Law are that while the law must be administered in fairness and equity, the Supreme Law of the Church is the salvation of souls.

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Sept 2020