

Homily for the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, A, Sept. 6, 2020

We have just gone through one hurricane this year but we know we are still in the hurricane season. We are also still in this coronavirus year as well. In times like this we realize we are all brothers and sisters facing these challenges together. We try to put aside any difficulties we might have with others in order to work for the good of all.

Our readings remind us that we are a community of believers. Remember the words God spoke to Cain: “*Where is your brother?*” Cain answered: “*Am I my brother’s keeper?*” The answer is **yes, you are**. And in fact, our relationship with God depends intimately on how we relate to one another. For Jesus said: “*By this will all people know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*” And again, we are to be judged and that judgment will be based on what we did for the “*least of our brothers and sisters!*”

Yet, there is always that reluctance we might feel to involve ourselves in other people’s problems. Natural disasters remind us that at times we must get involved, especially in matters of life and death. Still, when we do get involved, conflicts and divisions may occur. In our Gospel Jesus gives us rules for dealing with such conflicts.

To begin with notice that Jesus’ thrust is always a call to reconcile differences rather than punishment with no hint of any revenge. He gives us three stages: The **first** stage is to settle any differences between people in conflict by dealing with the issue one on one. If this fails then the **second** stage is to bring in some witnesses to help solve the difficulties. If this fails the **third** stage is to bring the case to the assembly or the local church. If that fails, then treat the offending party as an *outsider not as an enemy*.

Some people may say how do you reconcile this process with Jesus's openness to sinners -- for example, the parable of the Prodigal Son? I think it does -- when Jesus forgives people he tells them to avoid this sin in the future. In the case of the prodigal son, the son has already changed his evil ways and returns home only hoping to be treated as a servant and not as a son.

In Ezekiel's reading today we see an example of one's responsibility to deal with others. He is told that if he fails to prophesize by calling people to holiness, he will be held responsible for what happens. And in the reading from St. Paul we are reminded that to love one another is the answer to all the commandments.

The readings today remind us that as members of the Christian community, we are often called to acts of love and forgiveness towards others. However, because we often think our call as Christians is a personal one -- only between God and ourselves -- we may become concerned then only with our own personal relationship with God. That is not true. The fact is that to be a Christian is to be a true and loving person as a part of a loving and caring community.

Yes, tragedies such as hurricanes and this year of the coronavirus remind us we are our brother's keeper and called to act when action is needed.