

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year A, 2023

It is the task of the weather forecaster to warn people about possible dangerous conditions such as hurricanes, tornados, snow, wind, hail and fire. The officials of the weather service are not excused from their duty of reporting, whether the people listen to the warning, or it makes some people upset or uncomfortable. The readings of today remind us that we have responsibility toward the

Christian well-being of others, even when that might make them upset or uncomfortable. The weather service cannot prevent floods and hurricanes. But it can help people to be safe. We can help people prevent spiritual tragedies in their lives if we can read the signs, and alert them to potential dangers. When you see someone becoming irregular in prayer or in church attendance, you can be sure that it is only a matter of time before that person stops going to church altogether. If you can see that, and warn them or encourage them to be regular, or offer some assistance, you will help avoid spiritual catastrophes.

A young girl, Lynda, was baptized and brought up in the Catholic faith but became irregular in going to church when she was 15 after her Confirmation, and when she was 18, she stopped going to church altogether. Then for 12 years, she was on a “roller-coaster ride,” experimenting with atheism, Spiritism and New Age. Within those years, she was married and divorced twice, and now living with three kids. Fortunately for her, she found her way back to the Church because of her 7-year-old daughter, Amy. Amy’s best friend at school was a Catholic. So Amy asked her Mom if she could go to church on Sunday with her best friend. Then Lynda realized how much her parents had done for her growing up and how little she had done for her children. So she began to take them to church. Narrating her story, Lynda said, “What hurt me most was that nobody ever told me or warned me of the dangers of what I did when I was young and stupid. Nobody ever phoned or visited to find out what was wrong.”

What are you doing to help your family or friends who are in such situations to find their way back to the Church? Today’s readings invite us to review your answer to the question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” What is your attitude toward the lax members of our Church? It should be our business to reach out to them. We read in Genesis the story of Cane and Abe: Cane killed Abel out of his jealousy, and when God

Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” “I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9)



asked him, “Where is your brother?” Cain’s response was, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Ever since, humanity has fallen into that attitude. The answer to that question is, “Yes! We *are* our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers!”

In the first reading, God tells Ezekiel that he has appointed him as shepherd over the people of Israel. He is to warn them when they do wicked things. He is to speak out and

dissuade the wicked. If he fails to do that and, if they die in their wickedness, the Lord says that He will hold Ezekiel responsible for their death. Like Ezekiel we, too, have inherited a prophetic mission—by our baptism.

In the gospel reading, Jesus asks to point out the mistakes and correct our brothers and sisters. But always do it with gentleness and love. Do not feel bad when someone points out your mistakes. On our part, we need to help others to recognize their mistakes as well. Wouldn’t you warn your children of physical dangers? If your child wants to swim in a lake, and you know that there are alligators, would you warn him? If your child is texting while driving, would you warn him? You see physical dangers. Similarly we need to look for spiritual dangers, and warn our family and friends. Hopefully they will see the dangers.

Also in the gospel reading, Jesus tells us to talk to our brother who has done something wrong. Today we all prefer to talk “about” but not talk “to.” We would like to sit in judgment and talk to everyone about another’s fault. Jesus says finally that if he, our brother, does not listen to anyone, then treat him like a sinner or a tax collector.

How did Jesus treat the sinners and tax collectors? Two prominent tax collectors in the gospels are Zacchaeus and Mathew. Jesus called Zacchaeus by name and told him that He was going to stay in his house for that night. Zacchaeus threw a party, and there he was converted. Jesus called Mathew to follow Him, and he went on to become one of his Twelve Apostles. It is important to connect before we correct.

John the Baptist was not afraid to admonish King Herod. Jesus was not afraid to admonish the people—especially the Scribes and Pharisees, the obstinate and the self-righteous. As Christians, we have not only a duty to do the right thing but also to help others to do the right thing. Let us not shy away from this responsibility—but to always do it with lots of love and charity.