

Rectoría San Juan de Dios
XXIII Sunday of Ordinary Time-Cycle A
Ez 33, 7-9; Ps 95; Rom 13, 8-10; Mt 18, 15-20
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The Tension of Community

Jesus has been instructing his disciples about their individual and community conduct. He has spoken to them about the temple tax, about who is the greatest in the Kingdom, and the lost sheep; now he speaks about “the pardon of offenses.”

In some translations of this Gospel, we hear that Jesus told them: “If your brother commits a sin, go alone and admonish him.” But the better translation is, “*if your brother sins against you*” or better yet, “*if your brother offends you.*” Because if we read in general “If your brother commits a sin, go alone and admonish him,” we could translate this as being sent to correct our neighbor across the street, perhaps correcting him for his bad conduct. This would be an error in reading the text. The neighbor would be right to tell me that I should not interfere in his private life.

The starting point of brotherly correction is “the community;” it is only if I am involved with this particular brother as a member of my nuclear family—father, mother, and siblings— or as part of my community family—small Christian community, church community—that I am obligated, even to give an account before God for him.

This is about being solicitous toward the little ones, for those members of the community who find it harder to live the fullness of life and love. Jesus insists that the place for salvation is in the community. Without community there is danger of being lost. For that reason, we have chosen as our theme this Sunday: “*The Tension of Community.*”

How important it is to come to terms with a certain “tension” in our family and communal relationships! Especially

when we live in a world whose culture assaults us with its propositions of “well-being and comfort,” “living without tension,” “hedonism,” and “individual pleasure.” How important it is to value a healthy tension of communal responsibility!

We can think about these three ideas for living in communal tension that the Word of God mentions today.

1-Let us learn how to be accountable for others.

This is what God asks through the prophet Ezekiel in the first reading. But it is not about being accountable by responding to every erroneous act of my brother, but to make a simple act of brotherly correction “for love.”

This means to admonish the brother, but through the love that I have for him because I want to preserve his most precious self, that which we, as the community, value in him.

Many times we need our family or our community to serve as a mirror for us where we can reflect on ourselves. Everyone can think about times in which someone has admonished him with love. It is something truly beautiful; he who is admonished, more than corrected, feels loved and this truly moves him to change his conduct, to remedy his error.

St Augustine comments: *“He who has offended you, in offending you has inflicted a grave wound on himself, and you—are you not worried about the wound of your brother? You ought to forget the offense that you have received, but not the wound of your brother.”* (Sermons §82, 7)

The best way of being accountable for another is to admonish him with love. Of the rest, God is in charge.

2- Let us have no other debt except the debt of love.

Paul asks this of us when he speaks to the Romans. It means being available to my brother, to accompany him if possible, even

peripherally if not allowed to accompany him directly, but to have this sense of accompaniment through mutual love.

Daily relationships create deceptive debts that can confound the behavior and the relationship of the community. Debts of money are a triviality, but they are capable of dividing a family, as in that old saying: “For the thickness of a peso a family is divided.” For that reason, no economic debt should take precedence over the mutual love between members of a family or community. In extreme cases, the debt must be pardoned fully so that the flow of love and fraternal life is not obstructed.

There are emotional debts. I cannot go to bed if I feel offended by my brother or if I feel that I have offended him. It is important to settle these debts as soon as possible. The offended person has to take the initiative, and the offender must recognize the offense.

But the debts of love are the most important and the only ones that have to be in this dynamic of “community tension,” when each member feels in debt to the others and when each realizes that he is always called to give more in the communication of love. We owe love when we feel so loved by God or by others that we don’t know how to repay that love. But we also owe love when, not having received much love, we are conscious of our responsibility before God to build a community of love, or to complete in our brothers the love that we did not receive, but that can change the relationship and transcend it in nearness to the plan of Jesus.

3-Let us affirm that the absolute value is the community.

God is a community of persons in continual communication of life and love. Jesus wants us to be like that.

This means that each member understands clearly that each one builds and contributes to the growth of the life of the others.

The saddest thing for any human being is isolation, to be excluded from the community. Nevertheless, whoever will not allow himself to be corrected must be excluded. This is a grave thing, something that no family or ecclesial community should come to, but it does happen. It occurs when a member does not understand this dynamic of communal belonging and the communication of love; through his own actions, he excludes himself. For that reason, Jesus is very clear: first the offended person goes to the offender; after that he goes with two or three others, according to the norm of the law (Dt 19, 15) and if they do not succeed either, then the last resort is the community.

In the extreme case in which a brother does not accept correction, it is up to the community to “bind:” that is to say, to excommunicate, exclude, to charge with the offense. And “to unbind:” to reestablish him in communion so that he can exercise his own communal tension, a healthy tension that confirms at each moment our mutual belonging through love.

How many have you bound and how many have you unbound? What tension do you live with in your family and in your community?