

## 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Reading I: Ezekiel 33:7-9](#)

[Responsorial Psalm: 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130](#)

[Reading II: Romans 13:8-10](#)

[Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/091023.cfm>



Our first reading today comes from the prophet Ezekiel. Last week, we heard from Jeremiah, who ministered in the closing days of the city of Jerusalem, before the exile to Babylon. Ezekiel ministered to the community during the exile.

Ezekiel brings a new focus with attention to the responsibility of the individual. Many of the earlier prophets spoke about the responsibility of the community to change. They saw the community culture that drew people into bad behavior. Ezekiel emphasized the other side of the situation. Everyone must change. Ultimately, this will be the source for the community culture to change. It is not sufficient to wait for others to change. Everyone needs to listen to God's word and respond. This theme is expressed in the responsorial verse: "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts

The verses preceding our selection present a parable about a watchman for a city who is to blow the trumpet if he sees an enemy approach. Our passage makes the connection with the calling and ministry of a prophet. There are two dimensions to explore. To be faithful to his calling to be a prophet, he cannot choose which messages to deliver. His role is to be the spokesperson, not the editor. Secondly, he is not to choose to whom he should announce the message. He should not decide who is worthy to hear the message and who is not. Jonah had that struggle. He did not want to give the message to the people of Nineveh. They were sinners and did not deserve the chance to repent, and when they did, he grew angry. A prophet is called by God, and in accepting the call, he must follow God's plan.

In our own lives, how do we hear God's call? It is unique to each of us. It is not what others want or expect us to do. The call flows from deep within, and it requires deep listening. Parker Palmer writes, "*Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic selfhood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be. As we do so, we will also find our path of authentic service in the world. True vocation joins self and service, as Frederick Buechner asserts when he defines vocation as "the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need."* (Let Your Life Speak, 16)

Ezekiel also directs us to the importance of warning and offering correction to those who are damaging their lives or others. God challenges us to care deeply for the well-being, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually of one another. It is not enough to just focus on my well-being. I am part of a larger community. We are sisters and brothers to one another, and we need to live like that.

The Gospel passage is part of the fourth "sermon" of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. It offers principles for the Christian community. The passage today continues the theme of mutual correction. Jesus instructs that correction should be done in private so that the person is not shamed before others. If the person accepts the correction, the situation is resolved, and no one needs to know. If the correction is not accepted, then the person should take others along to establish the truth of the situation. In rabbinical practice, determining the truth requires two or three witnesses to substantiate an accusation. This still

maintains a sense of privacy and is preserved from public shame. If the person will not listen to the witnesses, then it is taken to the community. If he refuses even a public witness to the truth, then he is to be treated as a Gentile. Being a gentile meant not being a community member, and it also implied that the person needed to be reached out to and evangelized. They were people who needed to hear the Good News again from the beginning. They needed to experience a new conversion to God and reintegrate the Gospel into their behavior.

In the passage from Romans, Paul offers a principle to guide all interactions within the community. He takes this from the teaching of Jesus. The commandments focus in one direction - love, You shall the Lord and your neighbor as yourself. The commandments that speak about expectations and those that speak about prohibitions, all seek to accomplish this. Our goal is to seek the well-being, wholeness, and fullness of life for ourselves and all who enter our lives. Those who enter our lives are our sisters and brothers. They are not objects or stepping stones to achieve our goals. We are offered an opportunity to accompany them and, with them, draw closer to God. This is accomplished when we love them, seek their good, and grow in life, even if they do not recognize the opportunity that is before them. Thus, St. Paul summarized the law in loving our neighbor as ourselves.

**Themes:**

Prophetic ministry  
Social sin

Reconciliation and forgiveness  
Conversion

**Reflection Questions:**

What experiences, insights, or relationships have helped you understand your calling (vocation) in life?

When you see someone living in a way that is dangerous to life (physically, emotionally, spiritually), what do you do?

When others have offered a correction to you, how have you reacted?

How can this be done with love and genuine concern for the well-being of another?

What could be accomplished if you asked: What is the most loving thing that I can say to or do with the person?

**Prayer Suggestions:**

For the Church: that we may be a community that continues Christ's mission of evangelizing and reconciling those who are estranged

For the grace of tough love: that we may speak the truth lovingly and honestly to those who are injuring themselves or others and be willing to hear the truth spoken to us

For the gift of listening: that the Spirit will open our minds and hearts to hear what others say and to be attentive to the word of God spoken deep within our hearts

For the grace to forgive: that the Holy Spirit will heal us of our wounds and free our hearts to forgive those who have injured or betrayed us