

Homilies from last Sunday

Homily for Twenty-third Sunday of the Year – A

Readings: Ezekiel 33: 7-9; Romans 13: 8-10; Matthew 18: 15-20



Fr Michael says:

Fraternal Correction

Today's theme is a ticklish one for us and our Society today – how far do we go to intervene in fights in the streets; arguments overheard; litter picking to name but a few. Most of us would probably shy away from doing anything, saying it is nothing to do with us. Today's Readings challenge us to think again and see if there is anything we can do. It is not a question of forgiveness – that is covered later on – but a scandal being given by someone in the Community and the various ways suggested for addressing it, from having a private word, involving two or three others; going to the Community as such, whose decision is binding: the harshness of the Church according to Matthew, seen in the condemnation. Ezekiel reminds the leaders of their grave responsibilities in these matters.

The words of the Psalm: “O that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your hearts, give us a key into what we might do. We are experiencing for ourselves something of the drought conditions that are often around in Africa and elsewhere – how dry and hard everything is. It is the same when our hearts are hard – it shields us from hurt, because we are largely invulnerable, but it is ultimately so damaging to us! We are cut off from love, feelings, joy. We might be tempted to do this in individual cases, but we still do ourselves a lot of spiritual harm.

A soft heart is a blessing, which leaves us vulnerable, but we can be touched, moved and warmed! There are a whole range of feelings which can be savoured and appreciated – it keeps us fully alive. Jesus came not only to cleanse our hearts but also to soften them, to allow God's Word to enter, to make them fertile for growth. Oscar Wilde was imprisoned for a serious crime; it was an experience that affected him deeply, because of who he was and his work in literature. He was asked what he would fear most in prison, he replied: “It is not that it might break one's heart – hearts are made to be broken – but that it might turn one's heart to stone.”

The words of the Psalm call us to a closer relationship with God, away from anything that blocks it: hardening our hearts against someone is one thing: to do so with God is another! It IS something we can do – but do we want to? From a spiritual point of view, it is one of the worst things that can happen to anyone: we are maimed by it. A hard heart can't feel, respond or love – it cannot experience joy. A hard heart is one that is closed, barren. A soft heart is a blessing, it can receive and respond; it can be saddened but also be deliriously happy. Softened by the rain of God's grace, warmed by the sun of His love – the human heart can be turned from a desert into a garden! Where are we on the scale between the one and the other?

Homily for 23rd Sunday of the year A



Fr Tom says:

Jesus is closer to us than we are to ourselves

Read the passage from St. Paul before the other Readings this week: *“love is the one thing that doesn’t hurt your neighbour”*¹. He says. Love means caring and concern, compassion and a deep desire to give of our best to a person, to want their happiness, someone for whom you are willing to make any sacrifice. Christian love invites us to go even further. We love others because it is for the good of the whole family, the whole community.

For many years a farmer won the prize for the best Wheat Crop in Hertfordshire. On being asked why he was able to win the prize every year, he replied that every year he gave all the local farmers grain from his winning crop. When asked why he did that, he said, when they grow their crops they will not only have good produce but will provide the right environment for me to be able to make mine even better. Ultimately in helping others we help ourselves. It is from this perspective that the wisdom of Ezekiel and of Jesus makes common sense. By helping others to see the error of their ways, the whole community will benefit. In order to better understand this wisdom, however, we will do well to reflect on what we understand by sin. Not only does sin separate us from God, it is both divisive and destructive. Sin gradually sucks the life and goodness out of us just like a disease. It leave us paralysed, unable to do the good we want we want to do, it fosters loneliness, cutting us off from those we love and promotes a sense of hopelessness and despair. God never wanted that for us – no wonder he sent his Son to lead us out of darkness into light and hope and life. Because we are a loving people, therefore we, like God, like Jesus, will want to help others avoid the deadly consequences of sin – out of love rather than because it is our duty, responsibility.

Isn’t this the way we nurture our children for whom we want the best? Sometimes this can be a long journey but we would never give up and we would use every means possible to win our children over to a way of living that fosters and promotes hope, happiness and life. The wisdom of Jesus tell us that, in order to challenge someone over the error of their ways, we don’t begin by making a big show of it but approach them quietly and discretely. If that doesn’t work, we look to other to give us their support. Only in the last extreme, and for something seriously harming to others, would we go to the community which would want to help in any way possible

Jesus’ comment about treating them like pagans and tax collectors can easily be misunderstood. Unlike the society in which Jesus lived which excluded them, cast them out, Jesus worked even harder and put in even more effort to restore them to the community and we should do the same. Jesus never lets us journey alone. We want to make others aware of his reassuring, supportive and uplifting presence. As the Liverpool supporters remind us: We never walk alone!!

¹ Romans13:10