

When Correcting Others We Must Start With Our Own Humility and Love

c-a-23rd Sunday of OT – September 06, 2020

Thank you for allowing me to go on retreat in Saskatoon.

All week long I felt I was listening to a football coach.

What I mean is, whenever a football team is on a losing streak, the coach always says,
“We need to get back to the fundamentals.”

Now I am not saying that we are on a losing streak,
but the retreat director did spend a lot of time on the fundamentals.

And in much of his message he was quoting talks Pope Francis gave to priests...in various places.

It was good to hear the message:

- 1) That we have been Called and chosen by God.
- 2) That we have been ordained for a special mission.
- 3) That we need to be men of joy.
- 4) And that we need to live our lives for others.

Like I said, nothing new...but it was good to hear.

And I want to thank you for allowing me to go.

Having said that, nobody that I know likes to hear the words, “What you are doing is wrong.”

For the most part it takes a great deal of humility to admit that you are wrong.

So when someone comes up to you and says, “What you are doing is wrong...
your first response will be to put up a fight.

This is why most people hate being a prophet.

God sends them to a group of people who are doing something wrong,
and expects the prophet to preach his word.

Now I have to say our God is a demanding God.

Not only does he send a prophet to preach his message, he knows that:

- 1) The people do not want to hear it,
- 2) and ... The prophet doesn't want to give it...

but he tells the prophet, “If I give you a message to deliver, and you do not deliver it,
and the straying person dies, their blood will be on your hands.”

Talk about being between a rock and a hard place.

We need to remember what Jesus told us, “I will be with you until the end of time.”

He did not say, “I will lay out a red carpet for you, remove all the obstacles in your way,
and everything in your life will be peaches and cream.”

We need to remember that Jesus died on the cross.

In the garden of Gethsemane he sweated blood,
because he did not want to die on the cross.

But as much as he did not want to die on the cross,
he wanted to do the will of his father even more.

There are times when we are faced with our own crucifixion.

When we do, we will be asked to do something we do not want to do.

When that happens, I pray we will have the courage to do the will of the Father even more.

In the gospel Jesus teaches and strives for reconciliation.

He tells us, if a brother or sister is doing something wrong,
go out and point out their fault.

In other words play the prophet,

explain to them that what they are doing is contrary to the will of God.

Hopefully they will listen to you.

If they don't, bring someone with you,

someone who has a vested interest in what is happening, and get them to help you.

If they don't listen to you at that point; bring it to the Church.

Now I have to be clear here, when Matthew is referring to the church,
he is not referring to the bishop and priests.

Matthew wrote his gospel before the hierarchy was firmly established.

I think when Matthew wrote this gospel,

when he was referring to the church;

he was referring to the people of God, the parish community.

If they do not listen to the parish community, let them be as a Gentile or a Tax Collector.

In other words treat them as an outsider.

Now this might seem harsh...and it is...

but if someone is not living in the way God asks that we live,
we cannot pretend everything is okay.

If we do, we are not protecting the integrity of the community,

nor are we doing what is best for the individual.

In the end, if we do nothing, the individual and the community will both be compromised.

I also have to be clear here.

In the western world that we live in, we have equated doing right with following the law.

I haven't broken any laws; therefore I am doing everything right.

In the second reading Paul makes reference to this.

He lists the commandments,

and he knows every good Jew knows all 613 laws of the Old Testament.

If you notice he does not say, "Follow all the laws and you will be okay."

He says, "Love is fulfilling the Law" and "Love does no wrong to a neighbour." When he is saying this, he means the Spirit of the Law, not the letter of the law.

It is impossible to have a law for every possible scenario.

When I was taking Canon Law in the seminary,

in the first class our professor noted that a good Canon Lawyer

needs the Greek virtue of Epikeia.

The ability to apply the Law.

It is not hard to be a legalist. Simply following the law.

But to allow Love to be at the heart of everything you do.

That is difficult.

But that is also what it means to be a Christian.

Being a Christian is a follower of Christ...who is the personification of love.

I cannot even begin to count the number of times Jesus was challenged by legists,
about what the law says.

The law says you should not work on the Sabbath,

yet you disciples are picking heads of grain...which is work.

Who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind.

This woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery,
the law requires that she be stoned...what do you say,

In all of these cases, they were trying to reduce love down to a set of laws.

That is not what love is all about.

When Jesus was asked, "What is the greatest law?" He said,

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your mind and with all your strength.

And you shall love your neighbour as yourself."

In other words love is an attitude that must permeate every fiber of your being.

If it does not, then all you are is a legalist.

Let me put it a different way.

If you were to die and Jesus met you at the Pearly Gates, and he asked you.

Do you love me,

and your response was,

"Well I didn't break any of the 10 Commandments
or any of the other directives of the Church."

And Jesus asked again, "But did you love me..."

Did every breath you took, did every word you spoke,

did every action you perform--radiate with your love for me..."

What would be your response?