

**September 7 - 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Prepared by Kathleen McNeely, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns**

Ezekiel 33: 7-9	The price of inaction – you must act to tell the wicked man to change his ways or else you are both accountable...
Psalms 95: 1-2, 6-7, 8-9	“If today you would hear his voice; harden not your hearts ...”
Romans 13: 8-10	All the commandments can be summed up in “love your neighbor as yourself.”
Matthew 18: 15-20	Obligation to pursue justice – if your brother does you wrong take it to him, if he does not listen, gather witnesses, if he still does not listen take it to the church... if not then, then break with (throw him out of community) let him go... what is bound on earth is bound in heaven. Pray: when two or three are gathered, there I am in the midst of them.”

The readings today are clear about our ultimate responsibility to pursue justice. The first reading tells us that inaction has its costs – the one who does not tell the wicked one to change his/her ways is also held accountable. The Gospel of Matthew gives some ways of dealing with the evil doer in the community, taking your case to higher and higher levels. Sometimes pursuing justice has its costs, but so does inaction and it is God’s will that justice prevail.

These Sunday readings bring to mind Father John Kaiser, a Mill Hill missionary from Minnesota who served 36 years in Kenya. Kaiser had something to say about corrupt politicians who stirred up ethnic differences to create chaos and violence much like the violence that erupted in Kenya earlier this year.

At an inquiry into why tribal clashes killed hundreds in the run-up to Kenya's first multiparty election in 1992, Kaiser had testified that two Cabinet ministers had encouraged the strife by giving inflammatory speeches and in some cases, financing persons responsible for the violence and driving thousands of people off their land. Kaiser further accused these high-level government officials of stealing land from the poor. Later, Kaiser assisted a young woman who had been raped by a particularly well-placed politician to take her case to court.

Kaiser was up against formidable foes in his pursuit of justice for some of the most impoverished, disenfranchised people of Kenya. One night in August 2000 he was killed, shot in the back of the head and left beside road north of Nairobi. His friends, colleagues and the community he served were outraged; they demanded justice. Following the example of Kaiser, and like the people in Matthew’s gospel who went to other venues to seek justice, these colleagues pursued an independent investigation of his death.

Not trusting the Kenyan police, which at the time was controlled by the same politicians with whom Kaiser tangled, Kaiser’s colleagues worked within international justice and peace circles to pass a U.S. Congressional resolution to more thoroughly investigate his death. U.S. FBI agents were called in to review the evidence collected by Kenyan police. But as the investigation unfolded, the FBI corroborated with Kenyan authorities calling his death a possible suicide.

Not unlike the disgruntled brother in Matthew’s gospel, Kaiser’s colleagues decided to take the case to the next level, and they called for an inquest into his death. After starts and stalls over a period of seven years, though his murderer was not identified, a ruling came down overturning the “suicide theory” and establishing that Kaiser in fact was murdered.

Clearly the readings we heard from Ezekiel and from Matthew point in the direction of taking individual responsibility to stand up to those who are pursuing evil and to call them to justice, first by confronting them face to face, and if that proves unsuccessful, then by gathering the community as witnesses. Paul’s letter to the Romans encourages us to follow the commandments and to do good, but he sums it all up by saying that we are called to “love your

neighbor as yourself.” And in our globalized world, our neighbor is not just the person we see every day, our neighbors are people around the globe from Bangkok to Nairobi to Lima, Peru.

Today we are called to do love our neighbor in a shrinking world and to do justice. Sometimes that means confronting a brother, sister or close friend behind closed doors. But sometimes loving our neighbor will take us into the political sphere to denounce politicians who inflict harm on those who’ve suffered most or to challenge decision-makers to promote more just policies.

Looking at our own country, we are reminded as the anniversary of September 11, 2001 approaches that there are plenty of people in the world who do not view the U.S. in a positive light. Decisions made here in the United States have big impacts on people in other countries. Loving our neighbor brings with it the responsibility to challenge politicians to forge neighborly relationships and create a new image for our nation.

Finally, the Gospel of Matthew encourages us to pray:

- Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
- If two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father.
- For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

In the pursuit of justice sometimes we need to step back, to pray, to let the spirit fill us with wisdom to try to see things from another’s perspective. We are not in Kenya where there has been a history of violence ignited around elections; but U.S. elections can often become very contentious. We’ve seen it – candidates and individuals at each others’ throats over what and who to support.

At the end of the process whether the person sitting in office was our top choice or not, we must not let our difference keep us from prayerfully loving our neighbors and pursuing justice not only for ourselves but for all of our neighbors in this shrinking world!

### **For more information:**

On Fr. Kaiser, go to: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Anthony\\_Kaiser](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Anthony_Kaiser); <http://www.parish-without-borders.net/global/kenya1.htm> and/or <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/R?r106:FLD001:S60093>

Just and realistic government policy will be required from our next leaders in Congress and in the White House. Making decisions which leaders are most capable requires prayer and informed reflection. Read more about the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions in Maryknoll’s “Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world,” a resource developed by Maryknoll missionaries who witness the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions. Through this resource, Maryknoll missionaries encourage voters in the 2008 elections to scrutinize candidates’ policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the U.S. and overseas, lack basic necessities, endure the scourge of racism, live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change.

Email for a copy, or go here for the guide: [www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm](http://www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm)

**Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns: *Peace, Social Justice & Integrity of Creation***  
P.O. Box 29132 Washington, D.C. 20017  
phone: (202)832-1780 fax: (202)832-5195  
[ogc@maryknoll.org](mailto:ogc@maryknoll.org) [www.maryknollogc.org](http://www.maryknollogc.org)