

September 7 - 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Times

Prepared by Fr. Joseph Towle, MM

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| Ezekiel 33:7-9 | The Prophet Ezekiel speaks from exile in Babylon in the 6th century BC. |
| Psalms 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9 | St. Paul stresses the dignity of the human person when he writes: "Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another." |
| Romans 13:8-10 | Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law. |
| Matthew 18:15-20 | Jesus acknowledges weakness and sin and recommends an openness and receptiveness to the suggestions of other members of the community. |

Living justly in this world is never an easy undertaking. There are too many siren calls, too many blinding lights, too many incitements that beckon us to follow their promises. Be it drugs, sex, money, violence, fame on YouTube or personal ambition and egoism, life can be a troublesome journey of constant decision-making. It can often feel like we live in exile, unconnected to roots and home, left to our own. How to decide what I want for myself, what I want to do with my life, how to relate to others?

Years ago I visited fellow Maryknollers working in refugee settlements in El Salvador and Mexico during the area's raging wars (1980-1996.) The houses, even in the best of the camps, were flimsy one room affairs, with walls of boards or poles. People knew the camp was temporary and didn't build permanent structures, yet no one knew how long they would live there. It was like straddling a puddle of water – a very unsettling experience! Their lives were on hold. Their hopes centered on the day when peace would come and they could gather up their few belongings to return home.

Ezekiel was called to be a prophet in Babylon and presumably died in exile without ever seeing his homeland again. His work must have been very difficult with temptations to give in to discouragement and despair. Yet he sensed that the Lord had an important role for him to play and he was "appointed watchman for the house of Israel." He was pulled out of his misery when the Lord told him in no uncertain words that he had to speak out God's warning to His people. If Ezekiel failed to teach the people, to dissuade them from following unjust paths, God would hold him responsible. That responsibility falls on all Catholics today, from bishops to preachers of homilies each Sunday, to lay people in their daily work in schools, shops, stores, etc.

St. Paul in this reading gets down to basics: the call of Jesus "to love one another." We have heard this message so often that it often falls on deaf ears. Even as it may have lost its freshness, we are called to preach this commandment. The Catholic bishops in their statement on voting in the 2008 election remind all of us that "that respect of the dignity of every person is the core of Catholic moral and social teaching." (#10) New examples, often supplied by the local press, can have a powerful effect in recasting this truth to our congregations.

In #20, the bishops state, "...[W]e all seek to advance the common good – by defending the inviolable sanctity of human life from the moment of conception until natural death, by defending marriage, by feeding the hungry and housing the homeless, by welcoming the immigrant and protecting the environment."

Today's Gospel is taken from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus speaks sober words to a people living in a world that many times seems like an exile. He refers to the poor of spirit, to the meek

and merciful, to the mourning and humble, to the peacemaker as blessed of His father. Mathew's chapters 5-7 reveal Jesus' prescriptions of how His followers are to live with one another peaceably and justly. Here His words center on the matter of fraternal correction, made all the more delicate because none of us is free from sin and prejudiced thinking. The Alcoholics Anonymous people call it "stinking thinking." Ezekiel surely recognized his limitations, yet he listened to the imperatives of God to speak out; with awareness of his weaknesses he was commanded to speak out to his fellow exiles.

When we work on bringing peace to a very violent world, intent on war making, on imposing the death penalty, on earning extremely high incomes off the backs of the hungry and poor, we also recognize the need to deal with violence in our own hearts. The two efforts go hand in hand. Perhaps more internal work is required in the matter of fraternal correction, to make sure that there is no envy, grudges nor personal antipathy clouding our actions.

What is the purpose of living in community if it is not for mutual support and brotherly or sisterly correction? Living justly and peaceably is a journey needing support and nourishment.

For more information:

Read more about the violence endured by people living at the margins all around the globe in "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 find the election guide here:
www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm

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