



Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 7, 2014

Responsible Loving

FOCUS: To listen with open hearts and minds.

LECTIONARY #127 Ezekiel 33:7–9
Psalm 95:1–2, 6–7, 8–9
Romans 13:8–10
Matthew 18:15–20

» Hear the Word

Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 18:15–20

READER: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

ALL: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, mouth, and heart.

Jesus said to his disciples: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that ‘every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, amen, I say to you, 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.”

READER: The Gospel of the Lord.

ALL: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

» Prepare for the Word

Begin the session with the short prayer from the handout on page 25.

Leader’s Context

Today’s Gospel invites us to reflect on what it means to be Christian brothers and sisters. Point out to the teens that they make up a small Christian community themselves. How are they responsible for one another? How are they mindful of the Spirit of God in their midst when they gather?

Liturgical Calendar Connection

Display the liturgical calendar and locate the Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time. Note that on Wednesday, September 3, we celebrated the Memorial of St. Gregory the Great. Gregory was a mayor, a monk, a pope, and a writer. Unhappy with his life as the mayor of Rome, St. Gregory allocated half of his fortune to the poor and the other half to the foundation of seven monasteries. After joining a monastery in pursuit of a simple life, he was elected to the papacy. As pope, he cared for the poor, implemented reforms to improve Church governance and clerical behavior, promoted the monastic vocation, and renewed the liturgy.

» Reflect on the Word

Difficult Conversations

It's never fun to tell a friend you are mad at him or her, is it? Jesus talks in today's Gospel about how to handle conflict. He says to start out by being direct with one another. This means that instead of talking behind someone's back, you should just meet one-on-one.

- ✓ **Have you ever had to talk to a friend who hurt you, or had to face a friend who was angry with you? How did you feel?**

Jesus then says that if the person doesn't listen, or if the confrontation doesn't go well, you should get some help, either from friends or from the Church. He's talking specifically about problems coming up in the early Christian community, many of which went beyond just two individuals. Even though the early followers of Jesus agreed that he was their teacher, apparently there were some other things that they didn't agree about. This is a normal experience in a group, isn't it?

- ✓ **What kinds of things do we sometimes disagree about here in our group?**
- ✓ **How have we handled our disagreements in the past?**

Jesus points out in this teaching that Christians have a special responsibility in how they treat each

other. Because of what we believe and how we have promised to live, we need to be respectful and straightforward with one another.

Another thing we can do when having conflicts, whether with an individual or in a group, is turn to prayer. We can pray for our friends, our family, or our parish, and we can pray with them, too. We can trust that when we do this, Jesus is truly present, lending comfort and guidance.

- ✓ **Have any of you ever prayed for or with a friend or family member in a difficult time? What was that like?**

All Christians have a commitment to one another, locally and globally. We agree to address problems directly, rather than blow them out of proportion. We work together as a community to reach out to those who are isolated or need forgiveness. When we act this way, we model Christian justice and mercy to the world.

- ✓ **Have you ever seen anyone in our parish, school, or Church leadership respond to someone who is angry or divisive in this way? If not, how could they do so? How could we help?**

As we decide how to handle personal, group, or community conflict, we can look to Jesus's words today for wisdom.

Wrapping It Up:

What kinds of conflicts do you think people in your parish tend to have, either in parish work or in their lives away from the parish? What are the different ways in which people tend to address conflicts?

How can today's Gospel reading help the people in your parish to address conflicts more effectively?

Connections to Church Teaching

Lumen Gentium, a document of the Church from the Second Vatican Council (1964), says that loving one another and praising God is a living out of the "vocation" of the Church (51). This means that each of us has a responsibility as a Christian to be in relationships in an intentional, respectful, loving way. When we do this, we contribute to the Church's call and ministry. That's a pretty big deal! It means that our individual actions each day make up the work of the Church in the world.

» Act on the Word

Role-Playing

If the teens do not seem to have much experience with difficult conversations, or are uncomfortable with them, role-playing may help. Talk to the teens about some of the conflicts they have experienced in the past, perhaps with siblings or friends, their parents, teachers or other discipline figures at school, or strangers such as store clerks. Once you have talked about some different past experiences, invite small groups of teens to come up and role-play these scenarios, showing how the method Jesus describes in the Gospel could have been used in the situation at hand.

Christian Road Map

You will need markers, masking tape, and white or colored paper (8.5" x 11" or larger) to lead this activity.

In today's First Reading, Ezekiel's role is to warn the people when they are going the wrong way. He is responsible for the community, just as Jesus tells the disciples in the Gospel that they are committed to one another. As Christians today, we are also accountable to our community of faith.

Have the teens think about the Department of Transportation in your state.

- What is its role?
- What kinds of signs does it put up?
- Where are the signs placed?

Ask the teens to think of themselves as the Christian Department of Transportation. Their goal is to keep people safely on the road to God. They will need to consider what kinds of road signs may be needed for this job. These may be warnings, instructions, directions, or detours. They may be similar to real road signs, or they may be other phrases.

Have them divide into pairs, and invite each pair to make at least five warning signs on their pieces of paper. Each pair then tapes their signs to the walls around the room. After this is done, let the teens wander around and read all the signs.

Discuss as a group how these signs would be most effective. Perhaps there will be a way to arrange for them to go up somewhere in your church or school building where others can benefit from them. Discuss the following questions:

- Should they be hung in homes, schools, churches, on roads, in stores, or in workplaces?
- At what ages do people need to read these signs?
- If these messages are not written on actual signs, how might people hear them? Who warns them?

For Next Sunday

Hand out, e-mail, or share on Facebook or a blog the following page to help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass.

LIVING THE WORD

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

September 14, 2014



LECTIONARY READINGS

Find the readings at www.USCCB.org or in a Bible.

Numbers 21:4b–9

Psalms 78:1–2, 34–35, 36–37, 38

Philippians 2:6–11

John 3:13–17

»» Reflect on the Word

Use these questions to reflect on the Word after attending Mass.

- How often do you think about the sacrifice Jesus made for you? Are you grateful for the sacrifices others make so that you can have good opportunities in life?
- How do you tend to treat holy objects and symbols? Do you treat them with reverence?

»» Act on the Word

Use these ideas to act on the Gospel during the week.

Do some research this week to learn about different types of crosses, such as Celtic, Jerusalem, Byzantine, St. Andrew's, or Dagmar crosses. Print out some pictures of them from the Internet, or post pictures of them to your social media sites. What do these crosses signify? Which do you like best? Why?

»» Pray with the Word

***Not to condemn, O God, but to save,
not to punish but to pardon,
not that we might perish
but that all might find abundant life
have you sent your only Son into the world.
In the face of life's pain,
and above all the sorrows of our history,
may we lift on high the sign of your Son's victory
and find there, for all our guilt and sin,
the healing gift of your unconquerable love.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.***

»» Prepare for the Word

Use these questions to prepare yourself to hear the Word prior to attending Mass.

- Pay special attention at Mass this week to the number of places where the cross is displayed in your church. Why do you think we display the cross in those places?
- What crosses do you carry in your life?