

23rd Sunday – Fraternal Correction

Among the major prophets of which there are four, one of the more pithy ones is Ezekiel who informs us of a much neglected work of mercy. All in all, there are fourteen works of mercy or charity. Do you know them? All are derived from the bible, the teachings of Jesus and are proof of our Christian identity. At the back of the Compendium of the Church and in the Catechism all fourteen are listed. At this very moment, I am exercising one of them, and during the course of the day you too will practise some of them, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and so on.

Some of these works of charity are easier to exercise than others. This weekend the Church inspires us to practise the one called Fraternal Correction or Admonish the Sinner. Now, back to our prophet who says in a paraphrased manner. "If you do not correct a sinner and he dies in sin I will hold you responsible ... but if you do correct him and he repents then you have saved your soul." In like manner, the Gospel draws on this same theme but Jesus adds what we call due procedure when correcting another:

Stage 1: Correct your neighbour individually – in private not in a public manner.

Stage 2: If he does not listen, then take some witnesses to prove your point. For after all, you could be biased.

Stage 3: If he still will not listen, report him to the Church community.

Stage 4: If he remains obstinate, then, ostracise him so as to convince him to repent.

These last phases are what we call escalating the matter at hand.

In the past, when our culture was Christian, people readily did call others out for their misbehaviour. It was just the done thing, as a coach will call out his players or an umpire or referee will blow the whistle. Today, with Western moral decay, we tend to shy away from admonishing the sinner in moral matters. Oddly though we acknowledge the obligation to correct folk on legal matters, such as driving, one may even loudly remonstrate with the horn. Fraternal correction, also abounds on the sidelines of events when parents watch their children play sport. Medical correction openly manifests itself in the wards of hospitals and nursing homes when protocols are disregarded – they even have security guards to ensure compliance with the above stages. Teachers in schools will call out students when they misbehave and break the rules.

The Ten Commandments are God's rules and we need to keep them all to enter Heaven. Generally people do not know them today, for they are not taught in schools, and even if they were most people would disregard them. About eighty years ago the West culturally dropped them. Oddly of the eight moral domains that they deal with, for two have the same subject matter, all but three domains are totally ignored today. These that still warrant attention are lying, stealing, hurting others: fifth, seventh and eighth precepts. When we need to correct people on these or other matters one needs to employ the two pin factors of who and when: the right person at the right time. Beforehand always seek counsel and courage from God.

On this Father's Day when we acknowledge the significant value of fatherhood, and how fathers fulfil the tasks of providence, protection and guidance we highlight how often they have corrected us. Good fathers do correct children fairly and gently on a regular basis so as to form them in good habits and behaviour. On all matters of discipline fathers provide essential formation. A home that embodies harmony and justice has a father that practises fraternal correction. On this Sunday, we should thank our fathers, and show some sign of gratitude for all that they have done for us. A text message is the least respectful mode! If they have died then we remember them at Mass, when we pause and pray for the dead, after the consecration. Let us ask Saint Joseph the patron of all fathers to watch over, bless and inspire them today and always.