



Christ in Our Neighborhood

Prayer

Loving Father,
You have given us your Son to watch over us and to Shepherd us. Alone, we are unable to stand. With Him, we can walk. Help us to stand and walk with your Son. Help us to carry on His Mission until we find our place with you. Amen.

Commentary

1st Reading: Ezekiel 33:7-9

This week, Americans remember the tragedy that hit our country on 9-11. The sad occasion prompted the government to be extra vigilant. Homeland Security, bullet-proof doors between airline pilots and passengers, and tightened security at airports, stadiums, and other venues were born from this terrible tragedy. The need to be watchful has never been more important.

God speaks to the Prophet Ezekiel in today's reading and commands him to stand watch over the House of Israel. Standing watch means to warn the Israelites that they must turn from their false ways and return to the Lord. The pressure is on Ezekiel. Should he fail to do this, he himself will be found guilty. However, should he warn the evil doers and they refuse to heed his calling, they will be punished.

Standing watch is a hard duty. But, it is necessary to protect us from ourselves. Humans have a habit of getting into trouble and so we need people to help guard us. Parents stand watch over children and teenagers, police are called to protect and to serve, priests and religious leaders stand watch over souls.

Standing watch is a 24/7 job. We can never let our guard down. Those who guard our country remind us that they must be right 100% of the time, while those who wish to harm us need to be right only once.

Let us pray for those who stand watch over us.

Question

In what way do you stand watch over others?

Commentary

2nd Reading: Romans 13:8-10

Behavioral psychologists speak of two extreme types of people: Those with a high internal locus of control and those with a high external locus of control. Those with a high internal locus of control are often highly focused leaders with little room for patience. They are often called "know-it-alls." Those with a high external locus of control are unable to focus and cannot seem to do anything without external forces to help them. They are often called "insecure."

Romans reminds us that we are called to be balanced in our location of control and this balance comes from the basic moral code: "Love your neighbor."

To stand watch, as we heard in the first reading, presumes that we ourselves have some moral compass. It assumes that we stand guard over our own moral behavior first and, should another person fall ethically or morally, we try to help them get back on track.

Those who have a balanced moral locus of control know that we are all imperfect and that we are bound to fail to live up to the commandments. We can't be like the "know-it-alls" who are quick to find the faults and sins in others. Nor can we be so "insecure" as to say, "I'm just a sinner and I can never live up to a moral code."

Love - which is the fulfillment of the law - is the necessary ingredient to keep us balanced. It is our primary moral code for living authentically.

Question

How is love the moral guide for your daily life?

This is the first of a three-week series,
Loving and Forgiving

Information: dphx.org/Christ-in-our-neighborhood

Loving &
Forgiving:
23rd Sunday in
Ordinary Time

Commentary

Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20

Standing watch does not mean running another person's life. However, it does mean that we have some role in assisting others in their moral development and basic human behavior. This is especially true among Christians.

In this series on "Loving and Forgiving," we understand that we have a Christian responsibility to encourage people to remain in Christ.

When a person strays, we lovingly accompany them back to righteousness.

The Gospel offers an example on how to address a sinner; especially if the sin is against you. First, speak to the sinner directly. Then, should he not listen, call for some help. Finally, if you aren't getting anywhere, solicit the aid of the wider church.

In this example, Jesus shows how patient and loving we must be toward those who harm us. This step-by-step approach toward reconciling with another begins with the moral code that we read from Romans. Loving our neighbor is the prerequisite for helping our neighbor reclaim his moral compass.

Did you notice how Jesus tells us to treat the sinner as a Gentile or tax collector if he or she does not even listen to the church? We might be tempted to think that this is our way to finally dismiss the sinner. We can finally be rid of him or her. However, we must always remember that Jesus dined with sinners, Gentiles, and tax collectors. Thus, we can never fully draw a line in the sand. To be loving and forgiving means to be loving and forgiving always!

Question

Have I ever given up on a person who has hurt me?
Do I at least offer a prayer for him or her?

This Week's Task

In response to this week's readings and in preparation for next Sunday, take some time to reflect on the prologue of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Article 25.

Group Prayer

The group prays the following prayer:

Father, please forgive us for not being forgiving.

Forgive us for thinking evil thoughts, and seeking revenge against people who have offended us.

Forgive us for hatred and for not walking in love.

Forgive us for gossiping, lying and for rehearsing in our minds what was said or done to us.

Lord, remind us of those persons we need to forgive, and help us to forgive.

Continue with Psalm 95

Psalm

Response: If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;
let us acclaim the rock of our salvation.
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the LORD who made us.
For he is our God,
and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Oh, that today you would hear his voice:
"Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as in the day of Massah in the desert,
where your fathers tempted me;
they tested me though they had seen my works."

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Conclude with an Our Father