

## **HOMILY for 23<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A**

This Sunday Gospel talks about disagreement & reconciliation. As I reflect on that message, I'm reminded to this cute story I'd like to share with you.

A Chinese man was having a quiet drink in a bar when a Jewish guy came over & slugged him so hard he fell off the barstool. "What the heck was that for, man?" asked the poor guy, pulling himself upright.

"That was for Pearl Harbor!"

"But I'm not Japanese; I'm Chinese," he said.

"Japanese, Chinese, they're all the same to me," snorted the aggressor, & returned to his beer.

A few minutes later, the Chinese man went over & slammed the first guy head first into the bar. Watching him stagger to his feet, he explained calmly, "That was for the Titanic!"

"The Titanic?" Dazed & bewildered, the Jew protested, "The Titanic was sunk by an iceberg."

"Iceberg, Goldberg, they're all the same to me," explained the Chinese man.

Anyway, disagreements & differences are part of our daily life. The challenge for us is to learn how to reduce those disagreements & figure out how to reconcile with one another. For God desires a peaceful community & a unified Church. Because of that high hope & the painful reality that we're facing now, this Sunday's Gospel wants to address the issue of reconciliation & making peace for us. Without peace & harmony, it's be difficult for us to build up a loving community & meet God every day.

The process for us to resolve our differences with someone is like this. We need to meet with that person first to figure out the problem & try to resolve it directly at that personal level. That would certainly be uncomfortable for both parties. But we have to face that tough reality & find ways to talk & reconcile with one another. That means we would have to make compromises & ask one another for forgiveness. It also means we might need to set aside our differences & learn to live in peace with one another. If that first step could not happen, get another person involved to mediate between us & the opposing party. As you can imagine, the third person is needed to help the two parties listen to one another better & resolve their differences. Without the third person, two disagreeing parties would not be able to talk to one another & settle their differences.

If the third person cannot get us & the opposing party to reconcile, then a reputable institution like the Church is called upon to get the two fighting parties back to the negotiating table. Hopefully the two opposing parties will respect the Church & shake hands with one another over a peaceful solution. Unfortunately sometimes even the Church cannot save the two opposing parties. If that has ever happened, we just have to pray for the other party & treat it like a Gentile or a tax collector. In other words, we should pray for the conversion of the other party with the opposing viewpoint as we often do to a sinner or a non-believer. Thankfully Jesus made us this promise in today's Gospel, "...If two of you join your voices on earth to pray for anything whatsoever, it shall be granted to you by my Father in Heaven." So, Jesus does not want us to feel discouraged & completely give up on our opponents. Rather, we should invite God to give us a hand in prayer & let God change people's hearts with God's own plan. We just cannot force people to reconcile with us.

I remember when I took ethic or moral courses in the seminary, one new concept that was introduced to us was the social dimension of sin. Most of us thought it was strange to see how sin could affect society negatively. For we usually view sin in terms of personal accountability. When we do something wrong or violate God's Commandments, we're held accountable for it personally. We cannot blame on someone else for our wrongdoing. Of course, sin causes lots of problems for us personally. But, sin also affects society negatively in many ways. We've just begun to see that aspect of sin more clearly in the last few decades or so. It is the social dimension of sin that today's First Reading wants to remind us about. Here is how it puts it, "...If I [the Lord] tell the wicked, 'O wicked one, you shall die,' & you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way, the wicked shall die for his guilt; the wicked shall die for his guilt; but I will hold you responsible for his death." Apparently the Lord tries to warn the wicked to change his way & wants to dissuade him from his current lifestyle. If we don't actively convert the wicked & the Lord punishes him for his sin, we would be responsible for his death. So, our failure to speak up & prevent a sinner from going down the wrong way will come back to haunt us. That's why in the "Confiteor" prayer of the Penitential Rite at the beginning of Mass we ask to be forgiven for not only sins of our active involvement but also the ones due to our negligence. By including the negligence part of sin, the Church wants to remind us the social dimension of it. When we keep silent & do not condemn sin, we are socially responsible for its consequences.

As we look around our country (& to certain extent around the world) these days, we see civil unrest & non-stop demonstration. I don't know about you, but it pains me to see minority & color people not being treated with dignity & respect. The injustice can be seen beyond their social treatment. It gets into every aspect of their American way of life – from lack of economic opportunities to limited access to health care & high education. It will take us for years to address the issue of injustice & figure out the root cause of this sin. For now, it want to say this. Apparently minority & color people continue to be mistreated. That has caused civil unrest & non-stop demonstration in our country. Meanwhile, it is sure not easy to act as law enforcement these days. It's dangerous, volatile, & difficult when people do not follow orders willingly. That is the challenging reality we are facing now. So, where are we going from here?

Continuous yelling & show of guns & violence will not make our current problems disappear. Cutting police funding & keeping on treating minority & color people like dirt will not get our society out of this vicious circle of violence & hatred. Believe it or not, the answer for our current problem might be found in this Sunday's readings. In today's Gospel, Jesus begs us to sit down & resolve our differences. He asks both sides of this current situation to shake hands & work out some concrete solutions. That means, both sides have to listen well to one another & make compromises. It is not going to be winning for one side & losing for the other. Most importantly, both sides need to realize the biggest debt they owe to one another is love. Here is how Paul explains it in today's Second Reading, "Brothers & sisters, owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law... And whatever other commandments there may be is summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence love is the fulfillment of the law." So, Paul calls on us to show love for one another by doing no evil to our neighbors. If both sides – the demonstrators & the police – would practice that every day, they would

begin to reconcile & find solutions for their current problems. They would be able to treat one another with respect & rebuild a just & loving society.

My dear brothers & sisters, differences & disagreements are part of our daily challenges. The question for us is whether we can reconcile & try to live in peace with one another. When we learn to do that & show love for one another, we will be able to overcome our differences & build a just & loving society for ourselves & future generations.