

HOMILY for 23rd SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Readings talk about loving & reconciling with our neighbors; reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story I'd to share with you.

Three older Jewish mothers were sitting on a park bench in Miami Beach talking about how much their sons love them.

Sadie said, "You know the Monet painting hanging in my living room? My son, Irving, bought that for me for my seventy-fifth birthday. What a good boy he is, & how much he loves his mother."

Gertie said, "You call that love? You know that new Tesla electric car I got for Mother's Day? That's from my son Bernie. What a doll!"

Golda, in turn, replied, "That's nothing. You know my son Stanley? He's in counseling with a psychiatrist on Park Avenue. Five sessions a week – and what does he talk about? Me!"

Anyway, if there's one thing that we know would inevitably happen within the human family, besides death & taxes, it'd be differences & disagreements. For humans are unique & different from one another. We see & do things differently from one another. Even twin siblings don't do things & act like each other. You say, "Tomato;" I say, "Tomato." You think that this is the best way to deal with something; I might think otherwise. So, at some point we'll end up disagreeing on something & stepping on each other's toes. I remember the first time there was a disagreement between me & my best friend. He & I walked to school & did lots of things together since kindergarten. We sat close to each other in classroom, got together at recess, & even hung out after school. This special friendship went on without a hitch until fifth grade. Then, one day I had to walk to school all by myself & saw him join another group of classmates at school. I did not know why our friendship ended abruptly like that. Later on, I found out the reason for the end of our friendship was because I did not let him copy the answers to our homework.

The Church was not the first one that realized there would be a disagreement in a relationship & a need for something like the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In this Sunday's Gospel, we learn how Jesus picked the topic of reconciliation among hundreds of other ones to discuss with us & help us learn how to handle it. Here's what He said, "If your brother/sister should commit some wrong against you; go & point out his/her fault, but keep it between the two of you. If he/she listens to you, you've won your brother/sister over. However, if he/she does not listen, summon another so that every case may stand on the word of two or three witnesses. If he/she ignores them, refer it to the Church. If he/she ignores even the Church, then treat him/her as you would a Gentile or a tax collector."

That is the step-by-step lesson on how we should handle a disagreement with someone. First, we go directly to that person & try to resolve it with him/her. If the problem remains, get a couple of other people involved & see if they could mediate between us & the wrongdoer. If they couldn't, then let's go to a public institution with moral authority like the Church & hope that the two sides would find a peaceful solution. If that doesn't work, let's consider that person like an outsider & treat him/her without much tender care & compassion. Meanwhile, this Sunday's First & Second Readings urge us to be our brother/sister's keeper & try to help him/her to change from past wrong doing. For we're bound to show love to our neighbor as the second part of Jesus' Commandment of love calls us to do.

Unfortunately, we live in a world that claims to believe in God & love God. But, many have treated their neighbors horribly. As you might know, America is well-known to be a religious & Christian country. People go to church a lot & hang Christian Crosses all over the place. But, they don't seem to take Jesus' teachings seriously, especially His basic Commandments of love. He asks His followers to love God with all their hearts & souls & love their neighbors as themselves. Sadly, many Christians these days often look down on their neighbors because of skin color, culture & custom, economic status, political viewpoints, & a multitude of other reasons. They don't practice the second part of Jesus' Commandments of love; & they still consider themselves His faithful disciples. That is why we've seen fights & violence break out around the world every day. If everyone takes Jesus' Commandments of love seriously & tries to live them out every day, we would have less fighting & violence happening around the world. Ironically, we've seen other religions have done violence to Christians because someone has shown disrespect to their sacred things. How can they justify the love of their God by hurting & killing another human being like that?

If we think that it's already difficult for Christians & other believers to practice the Commandment of loving their neighbors, imagine how tough it'd be for them to learn to reconcile with people who might have wronged them. I'm sure you've been involved with situations whereby people have done hurtful things & wronged you. You've carried that wound with you for a long time & vowed not to forgive what the other person did to you. The last thing you'd want to do is to sit down & try to reconcile with him/her. In fact, you'd do anything to get back at him/her. That's why we've seen regions of the world like the Middle East where the vicious circle of vengeance has gone on for years. Or, right here in our country, we've seen how one political party had gone after another over one wrong thing after another. Our politicians have made it part of their personal nature & daily agendas to practice vengeance & go after people who have done something wrong to them. We got to stop that madness & demand them to practice our Lord's Commandment of loving their neighbors & lesson of reconciliation in this Sunday's Gospel. Otherwise, we'll see constant fighting & endless violence happening around us. Eventually our world would turn into Hell on earth.

My dear brothers & sisters, this weekend our country commemorates the twenty-first Anniversary of September eleventh and the horrible thing that the enemies of America & our way of life did on that day. We went after many of them in Afghanistan, in Iraq, & around the world like most human beings would. But, if we look at the current situation in Afghanistan & Iraq, we can see that things have not changed for the better. Perhaps in light of Jesus' lesson about reconciliation, we should try to practice & preach more about that lesson with the world. If everyone would commit to live out that lesson, I'm sure our world would have less fighting & more peace, less hatred & more love. So, let's seek reconciliation & avoid vengeance in our daily life.