

The prophets had a tough job. Some tried to escape the job, like Jonah. But in the Hebrew Scriptures God was insistent, once he chose a spokesperson, they had to do the job. In our first reading today God makes it quite clear to Ezekiel just what his job is and the consequences of not listening to God and spreading the message God gave him. God says that prophets are watchmen, and that their main purpose is to warn. If God tells a prophet that someone is doing something wrong and they will die if they don't turn from their ways, and the prophet does not tell them this warning, then God holds the prophet responsible for the death of that person. So being a prophet, a watchman was quite a responsibility.

The Gospel today speaks about people who are sinning and also need to be warned. The admonition this time is to the Apostles themselves and they are being given the ability to speak for God, an awesome responsibility. Instead of God speaking directly to the prophet, the Apostles are given the ability to decide that someone has hurt them in some way, they are given the way to censure them. Jesus providing the way that it should be done. First, he says, the person should be talked to one on one, then if that doesn't work, a committee should speak to the person and evidence of the sin or fault given, and finally if that doesn't work, the community as a whole should meet with the person. And if even that doesn't work, the person should be shunned.

If you follow this process, Jesus says, then God will be in agreement with your decisions. It is the community of disciples that can make such decisions, and Jesus will be with them when they do. We often take this last statement "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in their midst" out of context and apply it to community worship and prayer, but in context, it was really referring to decision-making by the apostles regarding how the Christian life should be lived.

It does present a model, however for our church structures. We often today make the comment, as did Pope Francis – who am I to judge? We are told Biblically that we should not judge lest we be judged, so that today we make a big thing about not judging people, leaving it up to God. Does this passage change that view or conflict with it? Jesus does seem to indicate in our reading today that there are sometimes clear wrongs being done to a person, and that disciples have an obligation to try to change the heart of the one doing wrong, first by discussing it with the other person, then taking it to the court with witnesses, then to the congregation.

The judgment of the congregation, translated as the Church here, will be treated as if Jesus were making the decision, for he gives them the power to decide. How can we bring together these seemingly opposite ideas about judging people?

I think we can state that Jesus was talking here about giving the disciples the authority to act in his name in regulating the communal life of the Christian disciples. How should a Christian live out the teachings of Christ? So when an issue comes up and someone is living in a way that is questionable, the disciple meets one on one, then if the problem is not resolved, it is brought to a tribunal, and if still not resolved, the community or congregation itself should vote on it, with the authority of Jesus behind them.

As Catholics, one of the crosses that we must bear is the exercise of accountability. It is not always easy to call people to an accounting of their performance. It is hard enough for parents and teachers to do this, but it is especially difficult when those over whom we exercise this responsibility are otherwise our peers. Yet sometimes this is what we are required to do. This can

be particularly difficult for those who are in positions of leadership. It is an unenviable responsibility of pastors in the parish, coordinators of religious education, members of the parish council, principals in the school, and directors of liturgical ministry. Not everyone will take direction kindly, and they may be subject to resentment and even opposition. This is a heavy but necessary burden to bear.

As Catholics, we must also engage in the very difficult process of effecting reconciliation. Differences of opinion, misunderstandings, and actual offenses tend to alienate people. If this bad feeling is allowed to continue bitterness may set in and actual division result. We see this happen in families, in neighbourhoods, in parish communities, in workplaces. It is not enough to say, "I'm sorry," we must try to forgive from our hearts.



The process of reconciliation requires significant movement toward the admission of guilt as well. Both the one offended and the offender must be willing to be transformed. We must not only be agents of the reconciliation of others but especially must do our part in repairing the rifts in our own lives. This also can be a heavy but necessary burden to bear and a difficult task to accomplish.

All of which brings us to the theme of the second reading today from Paul to the Romans where Paul gives us the overview necessary regarding our relationships with others. We simply have to love them. In the Gospels Jesus points out to us that all the commandments are divided between the two great commands. They either refer to loving God or to loving our neighbour. The commandments are explanations of how we can do that. If you show true love and concern for the other, you will do what the commandments say without thinking about it. You will fulfill the law.

When we are tempted to judge, we have to find ways to love. When we feel wronged, we have to find ways to love. When we disagree with what is going on in our community, we have to find ways to love. It is not simple. It is not always easy. But if we are going to be Christians we have to find the best ways of learning how to show love with Jesus as our model.