

Homily. 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year.A. 5/6 September 2020.

Everyone makes a mess of their relationships sometimes in their lives; everyone, no exceptions; and further to this, no, it's not always someone else's fault. We're not devils nor are we God, so we make mistakes, choose badly and do the wrong thing from time to time. We're neither thoroughly evil nor perfectly divine, just human beings after all.

What matters when we wake up to our part in these failures is that we do our best to make amends and learn from our miss-steps. What matters for us who believe in the goodness of God is that we admit of our sins which have hurt and harmed others, seeking the Lord's forgiveness and help in trying to patch up what we have broken and heal what we have harmed. This means making new and better choices in our relationships, choices which work to bring together rather than sunder apart, decisions that lead to just actions and harmony rather than selfish deeds and discord.

In St. Matthew's gospel Jesus lays out for us, the community of His followers, a balanced and fact based way to manage the inevitable conflicts and disagreements that arise amongst us. He says to sort matters out between ourselves, not making mountains out of mole-hills by needlessly escalating an issue that we can resolve between us. If this doesn't work, then get witnesses who can verify the facts and mediate the dispute. Only when all of this fails should we consider going public with our dispute, calling on the community and public for arbitration.

As a last resort Jesus tells us that if a resolution can't yet be reached then we are to act towards the offender as if they are in need of the conversion

and the light of the Good-news of God's unconditional love and mercy won for us through the generous and utterly unselfish sacrifice of Christ. This is the basis of the awesome power and responsibility we have all been given by God to bind and to loose, to tie up and to set free.

St. Paul knew from his experiences that communities and their members could fall into disagreement and conflict, even boiling over into resentment and outright division. He spent a good deal of his ministry trying to sort out personal conflicts and community disputes, as even a cursory reading of his letters reveals. Coming towards the end of his great letter to the Romans he teaches us the best way of all to act, the way of love modelled on the life, deeds and mindset of Jesus Christ.

What we have to remember is that love is a verb, a doing word. Jesus loving wasn't just mere talk. It was something He did, how He lived, what He stood for and that for which He gave away His life for us all. Likewise, Paul says that we ought get into debt with one another, adding that the only worthwhile debt is that of our mutual loving. Paul went on to say that loving and looking after one another like we care for and look after our own well-being is the one thing that cannot hurt our neighbour, so it's our loving that fulfils all of the commandments. Sage advice here for us from both Paul and Jesus for that next inevitable time when we mess up our relationships, and waking up to ourselves, want to heal those we've hurt and help mend the bonds that we have broken.