

23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A – September 6, 2026 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham – 5pm Sat. Vigil; 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 935 words

Our readings this weekend teach us about the occasional necessity of confrontation. Some people have no problem with confrontation, but probably most of us like to avoid it. I had a friend who used to have a way of sneaking out of the room unnoticed when a topic that he was uncomfortable with would start to heat up. He's a priest now, and I remember – either when we were in college or in seminary – when he admitted that this was a challenge for him and resolved to start working on being more willing to remain present when difficulties arose.

The fact that this friend is now also a priest is relevant, especially in light of the first reading. The Lord told Ezekiel that he had appointed him as a “watchman” for the house of Israel. Ezekiel was a prophet, and his prophecy was especially to be in light of what he saw already before him in society and also what he saw on the horizon: he was to warn the people about moral evils that were already tolerated and moral evils that were creeping in. The Church's hierarchy, especially bishops and priests in union with them, continue in this role today.

One of our prayer intentions today, then, could be for our bishops, priests, and deacons – for all those tasked with the office of preaching, of being prophets for our time –, that we will not shy away from preaching even on the hard topics; that we will be vigilant watchman and preach the truth, whether it is “in season or out of season”, to borrow the phrase from St. Paul's second Letter to Timothy. For God's warning to Ezekiel applies to us, too: “If you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way,... I will hold you responsible for his death...”.

It is not easy, though. I remember when I first gave a homily about a certain life issue. At least two different parishioners reproached me, getting in my face – one rather aggressively – and another wrote a letter to the pastor. (He had me read it and then had me watch him throw it in the trash.) Wouldn't it be easier just to preach on topics like recycling and service to the poor? Surely. But I might risk my own soul in the process, for failing to exhort those actively involved in what we might call “moral evils that are far worse but more socially acceptable”.

My failure in that case would, in fact, be a lack of charity, and thus the failure to make good on a debt, calling to mind Saint Paul's teaching in today's second reading: “owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another”. It is loving to tell someone else the truth; of course, there are ways of doing so that are more or less loving. The truth is not a stick with which we are to beat someone else over the head, but we must not shy away from sharing the truth, either. It takes a certain finesse. For it does no good to anyone, to allow them to live in a lie.

But here we must admit that speaking the truth charitably to others, even when it is unpopular or unpleasant to do so, is not only the province of those in Holy Orders. All of us, by virtue of our baptism, share in Christ's prophetic role. Simeon held the baby Jesus and prophesied that he would be a sign of contradiction; woe to us all, if we never find ourselves in union with Christ in having to contradict prevailing fashions and trends that are immoral and evil, even when it is painful to do so. But salvation is not a popularity contest!

I will never forget the times in my eighteen years of priesthood when I had to tell someone a difficult truth, did so with whatever delicacy I could muster, and nevertheless was met with opposition about it... only to have that person come back to me some time later – in one case, it was years later – and thank me. After all, we are made for the truth. We have a deep-seated desire to know the truth. And Christ assures us it will make us free. Sure, they got flustered or angry at first. But then Jesus worked on their souls and led them to peace.

So the gospel challenges us on fraternal correction. We think about situations in our families – it could even involve siblings or our own children. Often, we fear disturbing the elephant in the room. But what do we really have to lose? If we first pray, then think carefully how to broach

the topic, then speak the truth in charity, and then pray again for a good outcome? Can we even imagine our Lord saying to us, “You know, you should have left them in their lie”!? No; quite to the contrary, he will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

“Owe nothing to everyone, except to love one another.” Do I really love everyone, with all the courage that that requires, or do I sometimes practice a fake charity, and hold back the truth? It can certainly be a heavy topic to consider, one for which we sense very acutely the need for God’s grace. So that is our task this week: besides praying for the watchmen of the Church to be courageous and charitable in preaching the truth, asking God for the grace that we may all do the likewise, each in our own place, our own way, and according to the proper measure. Amen.