

Your Lourdes Sunday Liturgy at Home

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 6, 2020

“where two or three are gathered together
in my name, there am I...”

– Matthew 18:20

These are reassuring words indeed for us who are away from pews of Lourdes and the warmth of our community. Jesus is with us at home too as we participate in our virtual service. The choir almost leaps off the screen into our living rooms. And there also is Jesus, in our praise and worship. In our sheltering in place, we are sheltered by the living Word of God, safe in his arms.

Today we hear Ezekiel alert the people of their need to repent, Paul call us to love unconditionally, and Jesus offer us a method for restoring the bonds of community. They are all worthy activities in any time, but critically important in our current moment in history. Paul reminds us that love is the central commandment of God. The artist Robert Indiana spent much of his life erecting huge, colorful stacks of the letters L, O, V, E which were installed in parks, public squares and skyscraper plazas. Now, we just need to do it.

One of the first books about Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement was titled *A Harsh and Dreadful Love*. The title referred to a scene from *The Brothers Karamazov* in which a pious woman tells a holy man that she dreams of serving the poor as a Sister of Mercy. The wistful thought brings tears to her eyes, but the romance fades when she considers that the real poor may be ungrateful for her sacrifices. The holy man replies, “Love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams.” That sums up the message of today’s liturgy.

The prophetic vocation is one way of understanding what Paul was calling the Romans to do. Prophets are called to make profound love of God and neighbor the underpinning of their everyday activities. Prophets have to love God in a way that leads them to listen so deeply that they share God’s heart. Prophets must also love others enough to risk their own comfort and even their well-being on behalf

of all of them. They show their love for the oppressed by speaking out for them; they act on their love for the oppressors by calling them to conversion.

In the Rule of St. Augustine used to regulate the religious life of Dominican friars, the method of brotherly correction is inspired by this week's Gospel passage from Matthew 18:15-20. It also resembles the intervention process used by families and friends nowadays to tenderly confront a loved one who has a dependency or addiction, and convince the loved one to seek help.

In the Matthew passage, Jesus presents a Four-Step methodology for dealing with someone who has offended another.

- In Step One, the offended person simply seeks out the other to explain what is wrong, hoping to restore the relationship.
- If that does not succeed, Step Two has the injured party seeking others to help in the process of restoring communal peace.
- If a few who agree on that goal still don't achieve it, Step Three is for the entire community to be called to make a prophetic statement about the problematic person.
- If the community's assessment goes unheeded, then Jesus says Step Four is that they should treat the offender "as you would a Gentile or a tax collector."

Note: Jesus did not tell them to punish, shun or excommunicate the person, but to treat him or her like someone who has not yet made a commitment to the Gospel, somebody Jesus would love to have dinner with. The community's approach to this person is no longer to seek reconciliation but to evangelize. Remember the countless times Jesus broke bread with tax collectors, Gentiles and "sinners" and responded to their pleas for healing. Sister Verna A. Holyhead reminds us this text is "a reminder that it was Gentiles and tax collectors, people on the religious and social margins, whom Jesus befriended, never giving up on his efforts with the 'hundredth lost sheep.'" Remember: the author of this Gospel, Matthew, was a tax collector, and Jesus called him to discipleship. (By the way, a similar four-step process was used by the group that gave us the Dead Sea Scrolls – the Essenes, a Jewish sect that flourished from about 200 years before Christ and 100 years after.)

This entire process demands a great deal from the community. Regrettably, we often start by talking about the problematic person with everybody except the problematic person! At first glance, Jesus' teaching about how to handle offenses in the community seems practical even if it demands more forthrightness than we normally want. (There's a serious risk that first the "offender" will scream and reject the gentle correction and that second the other two or three I talk to or the church community at large won't see it my way!) When we consider it more deeply we see that it reflects Paul's teaching that we "owe nothing to anyone except to love one another." The commitment to unity in the community, the commitment to the common good, becomes a blank check, an open-ended commitment.

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Prelude: Sing along with the Detroit Mass Choir, "Lord, Help Me to Hold Out"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1weW1zRMLu8>

Leader: In the name of the Father, † and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

Assembly: *Amen*

Leader: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and
the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

All: And with your spirit.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you call us as a community to live the Gospel:
Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you call us to be accountable to one another:
Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you call us to love our neighbors as ourselves:

Lord, have mercy.

Opening Prayer

Confirm, O God, in unity and truth
the Church you gather in Christ.

Encourage the fervent,
enlighten the doubtful,
and bring back the wayward.

Bind us together in mutual love,
that our prayer in Christ's name
may be pleasing to you.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God forever and ever.

Let the church say – Amen.

Readings for Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A September 6, 2020

1st Reading – Ezekiel 33:7-9

Thus says the LORD:^{[L] [SEP] 7} You, son of man, I have appointed watchman
for the house of Israel; when you hear me say anything, you shall
warn them for me.

⁸ If I tell the wicked, “O wicked one, you shall surely die, ” and you do
not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way, the wicked shall
die for his guilt, but I will hold you responsible for his death.

⁹ But if you warn the wicked, trying to turn him from his way, and he
refuses to turn from his way, he shall die for his guilt, but you shall
save yourself.

The Word of the Lord.....Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm – 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

¹ Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;
let us acclaim the rock of our salvation.

² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the LORD who made us.

⁷ For he is our God,
he shepherds, the flock he guides.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

⁸ Oh, that today you would hear his voice:

“Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as in the day of Massah in the desert,

⁹ where your fathers tempted me;
they tested me though they had seen my works.”

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

2nd Reading – Romans 13:8-10

Brothers and sisters: ⁸ Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

⁹ The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

¹⁰ Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.

The Word of the Lord.....Thanks be to God.

Alleluia – 2 Corinthians 5:19

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

¹⁹ God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ
and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel – Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus said to his disciples:^[15] “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother.

¹⁶ If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that ‘every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’

¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.

¹⁸ Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

¹⁹ Again, amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father.

²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

The Gospel of the Lord.....Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection Prompts:

Before you begin, sing along with “Center of My Joy” by Richard Smallwood:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ikyWlp_p0I

Sr. Dr. Barbara E. Reid, O.P. writes in her Abiding Word series about one of her sisters who had overheard a very hurtful comment made about her by one of her coworkers. For weeks, the rest of the sisters in the convent heard her replay the remark again and again, and the offended sister’s hurt feelings seemed to grow exponentially. “Finally, we urged her to go speak with the person who had offended her to try to smooth things out. After a pause, she confessed, ‘I think I’d rather have my grievance!’”

- Can you imagine calling someone who is going astray to be an act of love?
- Have you every participated in an intervention? Was it a difficult experience?

Mediation Prompt:

The phrase, “Life’s too short” is often time used as an intro to a plea to someone to reach out and reconcile.

- Pray for the grace to start a process of reconciliation with someone who has offended.
- Ask Jesus to give you a listening ear to be able to detect and discern those ways you have offended others.

Sing along with “Safe in His Arms” by Rev. Milton Brunson & The Thompson Community Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6IDRc8hZYA>

and then move into this week’s intercessions.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS – September 6, 2020 TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR

Presider: Let us pray in the name of Jesus who has promised his presence with us wherever two or three are gather in his name.

Worship Leader

1. For the church, may we practice in our own community life the commandment of love and the reconciliation that we preach to others. We pray: **Heal us, O God.** (ASSEMBLY RESPONDS: **Renew us, O God.**)
2. For forgiveness to supplant hatred and mercy to replace vengeance among all peoples; for an end to the trumpets of war, especially where they are blaring most loudly. We pray: **Heal us, O God.**
3. For prophets, confessors, counselors, teachers, parents and all in authority whose role is to confront and speak the truth to others: that they may do so with love and humility. We pray: **Heal us, O God.**
4. For renewed commitment to the Common Good by our national leaders in this time of so many crises. We pray: **Heal us, O God.**

5. For the people of Louisiana and all who were in the path of Hurricane Laura and the subsequent flooding, that they will recover. We pray: **Heal us, O God.**
6. For teachers and students beginning a new school year, especially in those countries where education is dangerous because of war or pandemic. We pray: **Heal us, O God.**
7. For Deacon Lennison and Maureen Alexander today on their 45th wedding anniversary, whose intentions are included in this Eucharist. We pray: **Heal us, O God.**
8. For our Stephen Ministry, its leaders, and all Care Team members and care receivers here at Lourdes. We pray: **Heal us, O God.**

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9. For all who seek healing from substance use disorders and mental health issues, that they find help and mutual support. We pray: **Heal us, O God.**
10. For all workers across the world on this Labor Day Weekend, especially the underpaid and those who work in inhumane conditions. We pray: **Heal us, O God.**
11. For all the descendants of enslaved Africans whose lives were touched by the caring ministry of St. Peter Claver and for all Knights and Ladies of St. Peter Claver as well as Junior Knights and Daughters, as they celebrate the feast of their patron on Wednesday, that they will strive to embody his care for the oppressed. We pray: **Heal us, O God.**
12. For an end to the Death Penalty and Human Trafficking, especially in Georgia. We pray: **Heal us, O God.**
13. For all those who are separated from us by infirmity, especially those listed in our bulletin, and for all those living with HIV and AIDS, that they know our community's care for them. We pray: **Heal us, O God.**

14. For all the dead, that they see God face to face, especially Wallace G. Roberts and Stella Mae Boyd for whom this Mass is being celebrated. We pray: **Heal us, O God.**

15. Please share any intention you have [PAUSE.....] as well as all our own needs. We pray: **Heal us, O God.**

Presider: God of healing, we come as people often needing to make peace with one another. Help us to remember that peace is possible when hearts are open to love. Show us how to be peacemakers in a world in need of healing. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Balm in Gilead. LET THE CHURCH SAY – AMEN!

Then sing or recite The Lord's Prayer.

Lean back and sing along with "Order My Steps" by the Gospel Music Workshop of America (GMWA) Women of Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCSuw1zs8Kw>

CLOSING PRAYER

God of unfailing mercy, who redeemed us and adopted us as your children, look upon us with tender love, that we who believe in Christ may enjoy true freedom and enter our promised inheritance.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Let the Church say.....AMEN!

Conclude by singing along with "God Has Smiled on Me" by James Cleveland:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqXwgextvhM>