

23RD SUND. ORD. (A)

THE CHRISTIAN AS A WATCHMAN

Do you know that my salvation, in some way, depends on you, and yours also depends on me? Do you know that we are each other's keeper? When Cain killed his brother, the excuse he gave of not knowing the whereabouts of his brother was "Am I my brother's keeper"? (Gen. 4:9). An indication that he did not care whatever happened to his brother.

Ezekiel was called to be a prophet by God and his prophetic mission was like a watchman keeping watch over a property so that no one tampers with it. His was not to take care of material things, but the spiritual lives of the Israelites. He was under compulsion to undertake his task and failure to do that would attract condemnation.

God cares for all of us and He expects each one of us to care about the welfare of each other. We are all owing one another, and that debt is to love one another. This is what the second reading is talking about. So whether you are materially poor or rich we are all owing, because we have been called to be watchmen for one another.

God is not ready to destroy any wicked person, so He has called us all to play a watchman's roll of guiding the spiritual life of each and everyone. When you keep quiet over somebody's evil deeds, you are equally guilty. You share in the person's sin.

The readings urge us to reconcile with one another and to show love. The gospel tells us to make all the efforts to make peace with our brother who has offended us. It is when we have been able to reconcile that we will be able to come together to pray and ask God for our needs. "Where two or three are gathered in my name there am I in the midst of them". If we are fighting one another, how can we have one mind and heart to pray for our needs?

If our worship today and every day is going to be grace-filled, then we have to reconcile with one another in our hearts and show love. Sometimes we harbour petty, petty grudges in our hearts due to some actions of a parishioner or a leader in the society, or even the priest, and we do not do anything about it; and every day we come together to pray

thinking that all is well. Our prayer may not be effective, because there is no unity and love. The Psalmist says, "How wonderful it is, how pleasant, for God's people to live together in harmony! It is like the precious anointing oil running down from Aaron's head and beard, down to the collar of his robes. It is like the dew on Mount Hermon, falling on the hills of Zion. That is where the Lord has promised His blessing - life that never ends," (Ps. 133).

It is difficult now to approach people to talk about wrong doing, or to talk about sin. There is the fear that it will be considered being judgmental. So how do we differentiate between being judgmental, or friendly in brotherly correction? The second reading talks about love, so I should be able to point out wrong-doing with love, and not to condemn.

Christians today are afraid to talk about sin and wrong-doing. Nobody has the right to tell any body anything. I go by what I think is good for me. But today, it is made known that we will be held responsible if the wicked man is not told to change his life for the better.

Most of us have failed in our roles as watchmen for the world. We are afraid to speak out, because we fear that we will be told to mind our own business; or we are quick to tell the one correcting us to mind his own business. Even children feel that they have the right to do what they think right and so do not need the advice of their parents, especially those who have attained the age of eighteen and early twenties.

St. Paul told the Church in Corinth that he was under compulsion to preach the gospel. He said: "In fact, preaching the gospel gives me nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion and I should be in trouble if I fail to do it," (1Cor. 9:16). If you help me to know my mistakes and I change, that is a sign of love. It is not only giving things to people that means you love, but also helping people to do what is right and just before the Lord. Today if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts.

21ST SUND. ORD. (A)
FROM HIM AND THROUGH HIM AND TO HIM ARE ALL THINGS

We have power and authority over people. We have knowledge, wisdom, and wealth, and rich in many things. Sometimes we forget that we receive these gifts from somebody - God. He has given us a share in His riches.

Isaiah, in today's first reading, is talking about God taking the power He bestowed on Shebna away from him and giving it to Eliakim. He will be given the key to the house of David, and no one will be able to challenge him.

Peter acknowledged that Jesus is the Messiah, who is to occupy the throne of His ancestor David; "He will rule the house of Jacob for ever and His reign will have no end," (Lk. 1:32b-33). Then Peter was promised the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

As Eliakim was promised that when he opened no one would be able to close and when he closed no one would be able to open, in a similar way Peter was promised that upon him would the Lord build His Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Peter's role as the rock on which the Church would be built did not depend upon the strength of his own will, or his ability to do something. He was not better than the rest, but due to divine election. The Lord chooses the one He wants, and we see this throughout the scriptures.

The keys to heaven are the profession of faith in God, hoping in His mercy, and loving Him with the whole mind, body and soul. The Lord has given the Church the authority to bind and loose. He has shared His power with the Church, and to help bring His kingdom upon the earth.

Each and everyone here has a share in the riches of God and in His kingdom, but we have to acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah whose kingdom has no end. He is the cornerstone, the rock foundation of the kingdom. "You are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus Himself is the cornerstone. Every structure knit together in Him grows into a holy temple in the Lord; and you too, in Him, are being built up into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit," (Eph. 2:20-22).

Who is Jesus to you? And who are you to Jesus? What do you say about Him, and what do you think He says about you? Do you know Him from the Bible, and testimonies people give, or you know Him as a personal Saviour and Lord? Are you a faithful servant in charge of the household, helping to establish the kingdom on the earth?

He has given us many things, but do we acknowledge that we drink deep from the riches of His wisdom and power? "From Him and through Him and to Him are all things". If He gave the keys to Eliakim and Peter to open and close, and no one could counteract what they could do, then He has the ultimate power to save and convict. This means we have nothing to boast of. Everything is a gift He has given to us freely.

Our existence in the Church is a pure gift. We have been sealed with the power of the Holy Spirit, and we are to be grateful to God for what He has made us to be, members of the Church built on the profession of Peter's faith. Are we building our faith on this rock foundation or on something us? If we don't build on Jesus then we build on sand, and our building will collapse, (Mt. 7:24-27).

20TH SUND. ORD. (A)

MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLE

Is the Catholic Church the one mentioned here? The word “Catholic” means what, or stands for what? It means or stands for “universal,” that is, open to all people.

In the first reading, the Lord made it clear to the Israelites that He is a God who is Father of all. The Israelites, returning from exile, would have had to adjust to foreigners living there as well. Some of these aliens were God-fearing and God-seeking people. They were eager to obey God’s commandments and draw near to Him.

God was ready to accept foreigners who were ready to minister to Him and love His name; their burnt offerings and sacrifices would be accepted on His altar. They would also experience His salvation and deliverance. His house would be a house of prayer for all people.

In the gospel a Gentile woman asked Jesus for help for her daughter. She acknowledged the status of Jesus by the way she addressed Him: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, the Son of David". Her faith was tested by Jesus and she passed the test. She received what she needed, the healing of her daughter.

St. Paul is considered an apostle to the Gentiles. He told the Romans that God's desire is that all may be saved, Jews and Gentiles alike. He told the Galatians also that everyone that has been baptized in Christ is a child of God. "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can neither be slave nor free man, there can neither be male nor female - for you are all one in Christ Jesus," (Gal. 3:26-28).

Who qualifies to be a "Catholic," and who qualifies to be in God's presence? What is the qualification to be in the house of God? Is it nationality, status in life, gender, age, colour, creed, size? In fact, all of these and none of these. It is the one who has faith in God and loves Him and does His will. The Psalmist asks a question, "Yahweh, who can find a home in your tent, who can dwell on your holy mountain?" And the answer he found is, "Whoever lives blamelessly, who acts uprightly, who speaks the truth from the heart, who keeps the tongue under control, who does not wrong a comrade, who casts no discredit on a neighbour, who looks with scorn on a vile, but honours those who fear Yahweh," (Ps. 15:1-4). So no matter who you are and your place of origin if you go by God's commandments and do what pleases Him, you will be saved.

Are we 'Catholic' the way the word means? Yes; gathered here it may seem so, but is it true by the way we relate to one another, and the way we accept one another as he or she is? Do we not behave like the Israelites before exile thinking that no foreigner deserved to be saved? Are we not acting like the apostles telling Jesus to drive the woman away?

My house shall be a house of prayer for all people. So I am welcome and you are welcome. But are we offering a sacrifice pleasing to Him? Do we come with clean hands and pure hearts embracing each other as God embraces everyone?

St. Paul advises the Ephesians thus, “Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of that peace that binds you together. There is one body and one spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one God and Father of all, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all,” (Eph. 4:3-6). “Let us be thankful, then, because we receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Let us be grateful and worship God in a way that will please Him, with reverence and awe,” (Heb. 12:28).

19TH SUND. ORD. (A)

LORD, SAVE ME!

Do I want to be saved? Saved from what? Surrounding us are all kinds of worries and problems, challenges and trials. Have you experienced

any? Which one? How do we find God in the storms and struggles of our lives, in the trials we encounter in trying to do His will?

Elijah was in the cave doing what? Why did he go there? To wait for the Lord, because Ahab and his wife were after him. God did not reveal Himself to Elijah in the manner the Israelites used to experience Him; not in the thunder, earthquake, fire, clouds, and wind. But he waited patiently. He encountered God in a gentle breeze. God showed the other side of Himself - a gentle God who does things in His own way in order to show His power.

In the gospel, the apostles were battling with the waves because of strong winds, and were terrified because they saw something like a ghost. But the Lord calmed their fears by letting them know He was the one. How come those people who were once fishermen were afraid on the sea thinking they were seeing a ghost? This shows how human we are and we have limitations, and so we need the saving power of God.

Jesus demonstrated who He is - the master of creation; He walked on the sea, asked Peter to do the same, saved him from drowning, and calmed the raging storms. As St. Paul told the Colossians, "God created the whole universe through Him and for Him. Christ existed before all things, and in union with Him all things have their proper place," (Col. 1:16-17).

The Lord has called us to come to Him. He has given us responsibilities to accomplish, but it is not easy for us due to many factors. We have the home to manage, children and grandchildren to take care of, husbands and wives to stay with, the Church to manage, responsibilities at work places, and many others. These come with many challenges and trials, and there is the temptation to run away from them as Elijah wanted to do.

In our daily struggles, we may feel that God is nowhere to be found, and He is not aware of what is happening. Fear grips us and we are afraid to move forward because we are overwhelmed by what we see around us. This happens most of the time because we have turned our focus away from Jesus towards other things. Peter was too overcome by fear to imitate his Lord. His fear was a sign of lack of faith, as Jesus told him.

And so it often is with us. Our fears make us doubt, make it hard to see His glory dwelling in our midst.

In the midst of these challenges have we cried to Jesus; “Lord save me”? The Lord has invited us to come to Him, but do we know that He can as well save us? Elijah sought the face of God, Peter shouted; what have we done, and what are we doing?

Jesus can save me from my fear of failure, weaknesses, lack of faith, unfaithfulness, and other challenges. He whispers in the midst of my trials. He always says, “it is I do not be afraid”. By faith, we should know, as St. Paul talks about in the second reading that we are heirs to the promises made to His children Israel. This is what the Lord said about the one who clings to Him, “Since he clings to me I rescue him, I raise him high, since he acknowledges my name. He calls to me and I answer him: in distress I am at his side, I rescue him and bring him honour. I shall satisfy him with long life, and grant him to see my salvation,” (Ps. 91:14-16).

8TH SUNDAY - ORD. (A)

GOD IS MOTHER AND FATHER TO ALL

Is there any difference between a father and a mother? What is the difference between a mother and a father?

The love a mother has for her children, and even towards other people's children is more profound and tender than that of a father. Mothers are more caring and compassionate than fathers. There is a special bond between a mother and child than a father. A mother cares, and a father provides and protects.

God cares for us as both father and mother. The tender loving care of God is like that of a mother, and how He provides and protects is like a father. So He plays the double role of a father and mother. We see these in the readings. It is impossible for a woman to forget that she is carrying a baby, but God told the Israelites that even if it happens that she would forget, He would never forget them.

Again, we heard in the gospel that God will always provide for His children. He will never forget His own. He will never leave them orphans. He feeds the birds and clothes the flowers, and we are more important than these.

Thus He has entrusted to us many gifts and charisms. We are stewards of the mysteries of God. But are we faithful stewards? We are not sure of who God is and so we place our hopes on mammon. Many of us are serving two masters. We love the creature more than the Creator. It is not only money that we serve but also our comfort and pleasure. There is doubt in our minds that God always cares, and we are not sure what He is capable of doing. Paul was not interested in human judgement but that of God; we are interested in human judgement.

But the psalmist says, “Only in God is my soul at rest; from Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be disturbed at all. Only in God be at rest, my soul, for from Him comes my hope”. Does our hope come from God, or something else?

We are occupied with daily cares and worries about what to eat and wear such that we forget about the Source of all that is good. We place our hope in what we can do or achieve. We do not put God first in all that we do. We sometimes consult Him when things are not going the way we want, and it is like try and error.

We are to seek first the kingdom and its righteousness and other things will be added. Is that what we seek every day? How do we seek? What measures do we put in place, or putting in place to achieve that? There is no need to struggle too much to achieve that. When we make the little effort, God Himself will supply the graces we need to succeed. His love and care has no bounds.