

Commentary on the Readings for September 10, 2023

The 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

The theme of the Readings for today is somewhat like a two-sided coin; on one side, we have "**Error and Condemnation**" and on the other side, we have "**Forgiveness and Reconciliation**." Now you might think, or say, "Oh, we've heard all of that before. Let's move on." But, have you heard of the most **dangerous** prayer? This dangerous prayer can often be the difference between one side of the coin and the other. Let us look at the readings to hear what they have to say and then we will come back to our subject of a dangerous prayer.

In the **First Reading**, from the **Prophet Ezekiel (33:7- 9)**, we hear God speaking to the prophet (and to us) about the prophet's responsibility and just how far this goes. In essence, the prophet is told that if he is given an order to instruct or warn a person or people of an infraction of the law and he doesn't do it, then those who break the law are not responsible; the prophet is. On the other hand, if after warning or instructing the people they continue to break the law, they are held responsible and the prophet is given credit for doing his duty. Today we have a saying that goes along with this: "**To be forewarned is fair play**."

The **Responsorial Psalm (95:1-9)** is a prayer more in the form of a proverb that says we must praise our God for His goodness and benevolence; but if we don't, there can be serious consequences. Therefore, be forewarned; don't take God for granted.

The **Second Reading** is from **St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (13:8- 10)**. In the two readings above, we have the negative side of the "coin." Here, in Paul's letter, we have the positive side, his teaching on "love of neighbor." At the end, he sums up the essence of this teaching: "Love is the fulfillment of the Law." (Love of God and love of neighbor.)

The **Gospel Reading** is from **Matthew (18:15-20)**. In this passage, we have Jesus giving instructions to the Church through the apostles. It is very much like the instruction that God gave Ezekiel in the First Reading. Although the language might be strange, it means that God is willing to forgive anyone and everyone who repents, but under certain conditions or format; and that format is the Sacrament of Reconciliation—for serious matters. We must remember that God is a loving God who is willing to forgive, but He has rules and formats that are for our good. The passage tells us that God, through Jesus Christ, gave the Church the authority to forgive sins of those who repent. The outward sign of **our** sincerity is our "**going**" to confession. The outward sign of God's forgiveness is the absolution given to us by the priest. The last part of the gospel reading is about prayer, which brings us back to our comment about the most dangerous prayer. Do you know what that prayer is? How often do you say amidst your prayers, "**. . . and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us**." God is always ready to forgive us, but do you really want Him to forgive us **ONLY** as much as we forgive someone else in our life? Be careful what you pray for. You might get **ONLY** that much. Something to think about during your prayer time this week! **MFB**