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Prayer and Correction of Others' Faults

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Prayer and Correction of Others' Faults

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Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday Readings for September 7, 2014 for Cycle A:

Ez 33:7-9; Ps 95; Rom 13:8-10; Mt 18:15-20

PRAYER AND CORRECTION OF OTHERS' FAULTS

Lawrence E. Frizzell

Among the most difficult tasks of a parent or educator is the spiritual duty of admonishing someone concerning failings or sins. There are so many ways to approach the given person and situation, yet so often the effort is rejected or misinterpreted! Clearly this is a subject worthy of prayerful reflection; the readings for the coming Sunday offer an opportunity to all for considering our way of handling this responsibility.

Through baptism and the other sacraments each Christian shares in the royal, priestly and prophetic offices of Christ. We are recipients of gifts flowing from these facets of Jesus' vocation and, as adults, we extend his work, "spreading a living witness to him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity..." (Vatican II, *The Church*, #12).

The major task of every Israelite prophet was to recall his or her generation to covenant-fidelity, the commandments being the gauge to measure people's response to God's will. At times, varying circumstances challenged the teacher to formulate God's message in fresh terms; however, even in exile, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and other prophets pointed back to the Sinai Covenant and its commandments. They also pointed beyond current dilemmas to a brighter future when God's authority (kingship) and chosen leaders (the Messiah, the prophet like Moses) would be respected.

The early teaching in Israel concerning the solidarity and dynamic relation between the individual and the community under proper leadership provided a profound insight into human nature and society. However, some people blamed their leaders and past generations for their sufferings. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Jer 30:29; Ez 18:2). This pernicious effort of exiled Jews to escape responsibility was combatted vigorously by Ezekiel. He was a watchman on the city walls warning the urban population of imminent danger (see 3:17-21; 18:1-32; 33:1-20). For long periods in their careers, Jeremiah and Ezekiel struck the somber note of admonition in their teaching. Although this made them unpopular and brought persecution upon Jeremiah, they both knew that they would answer to God, not for the success of their work but for the fidelity they showed to the entire message of God to his people. They admonished their contemporaries so that all would turn back to God's ways in their daily lives. And, in spite of the criticisms of the worldly wise today, Church leaders, parents and other teachers are echoing the same call. A fine summary of this perennial message is offered by St. Paul in the selection from Romans (13:8-10).

The challenge to forgive ranks among the most difficult aspects of the Gospel message. It will be the subject of next Sunday's readings. The corollary of the call to forgive injuries committed against us, opening to the plea for pardon, is the demand that the sinner show sincere repentance

by conversion. "If your brother (any member of the Christian community) sins (against you), go and tell him his fault privately" (Mt 18:15). The essential first step in "fraternal correction" is often neglected! How frequently a misinterpretation of someone's action or intention might be avoided by a personal discussion of the matter! Reconciliation becomes much more difficult after the supposed injury has been made public. The Gospel principles apply to all human relationships, but the emphasis in our text is on reconciliation and spiritual growth within the Christian community.

When we learn to live together, then our prayer will become more profound and more effective. More profound, because the community truly assembled in Christ's name and following his example will experience his presence as Immanuel (18:20). More effective, because all Christian prayer, and especially petition, must be ordered to building the Church as a witness in the world to the will of the heavenly Father (18:19).