

FROM THE PASTOR'S PRINTER

CORRECTING AND RECONCILING IN CHRIST

We find in today's first reading and the gospel reading that as people of God we are called to teach or remind people of what is right and just. In general, people do not like correcting other people in the spirit of Christ. Some people don't like correcting others at all. They feel that they are imperfect, so who are they to tell someone else that what they are doing is wrong; they may be shy and not like addressing anything that can ruffle someone's feathers, or they may feel that the person approached might bite their head off. Then there are people who seem to relish correcting others, they just don't like doing it in the spirit of Christ. Their first concern might be to make clear that they are the boss. They delight in correcting others because they then feel superior. Or they might correct others as an angry impulse to a wrong done to them. (I remember when my nephews were little, and one pushed the other. The pushee turned around and calmly said, "Brian, we don't push," as he pushed his brother to the ground.)

Why do we have a responsibility to offer what is called *fraternal* [brotherly] *correction* to others? First, because we love God, and as citizens of God's Kingdom, we live by the morality of that Kingdom, but we also work for the spread of that way of life. Secondly, out of love for neighbor; we do not want others to do wrong, even inadvertently.

How we correct is just as important as correcting. What we can discern from today's gospel is that love and respect for the person in error is of utmost importance. These qualities are sometimes very difficult to maintain if we have been seriously harmed by another. Revenge, a bitter fruit of original sin, bares its teeth quite readily when we have been harmed by another. While it is a "natural" response, it is not a healthy one. While commutative justice (evening the scales) is found in the Old Testament, this teaching has been surpassed by Christ's teaching that we must forgive as we want to be forgiven.

Some things to consider when correcting in the spirit of Christ.

❖ Take the matter to Christ in prayer and do not be afraid to seek the advice of others.

- ❖ Ask if this situation worth addressing. Is this a situation that the person is already sorry for, or one which we might be making bigger than it really is? If we are correcting people about everything they do, they aren't going to listen to the big issues. As St. John XXIII said, "See much, overlook a great deal, correct a little."
- ❖ Remember that the purpose of the correction is to bring things into right order, not simply showing the other that we are right. This means that we have to look at our own involvement and see if we were wrong in some way. If we are, then we have to admit to and apologize for that. Ask "How would I want someone to address me if I were the offender?"
- ❖ Time and place play a big role. When is the best time to address this with the offender so that there is a better chance of change? Do tempers need to cool? Is it a time when the issue can be addressed privately to avoid embarrassment. (Notice Jesus' progression: one on one, if that doesn't work, take one or two others, and then the community.)
- ❖ Think things through before meeting with the person. How would you say things so that they lead to reconciliation and not to deeper division? This does not mean the issue is sugarcoated, but that it is a statement of facts and not of opinions based solely on emotion. Admitting our own sin (if there is any) in the situation balances the issue.
- ❖ Consider what the other person is saying. Their perspective can change our understanding of what has happened. This does not mean that the person is free from responsibility, but it can help us to see who to avoid problems again.
- ❖ While we may need to vent to others, everyone we meet does not need to know the situation.
- ❖ Be open to others addressing issues in which we may be wrong or may have hurt someone.

A blessed week ahead. – Fr. Jeff

Love is the fulfillment of the law.

Romans 13:10