

My dear people of God, the basic theme that runs through all the readings is that **mutual love is the fulfillment of the Law or the Commandments**. St. Paul beautifully portrays this in the second reading- “brothers and sisters: Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the Law” (Rom.13:8). It is out of love that we do fraternal correction, assertiveness and speaking the truth in charity to our erring friends and dear ones. The readings focus on the painful responsibility of fraternal correction. The readings also remind us that we will be held accountable for our **silence and failure to speak up**. There are many situations in our own homes, when at times we are hesitant to speak up. In the first reading, the Lord sends his messenger as “watchman for the house of Israel” as a spokesperson of the Lord, to warn God’s people. The messenger of the Lord is sent to persuade the wicked from wrongdoing. If not, the Lord will hold the messenger responsible “...if you do not speak out to dissuade the guilt, but I will hold you responsible for his death” (Ez.33:8). The underlying message is that **we must be our brothers’ keeper**. Better still, we are all responsible for one another, in helping one another, to remain faithful to the Lord

In the Gospel today, Jesus the Good Shepherd, who knows difficulties in human society, recommends how we can live in love by using **dialogue** when we are faced with an unpleasant situation. We can use our gift of reason to appeal to others. We can appeal to the goodness of the heart of others. This presupposes a basic trust in the goodness of human nature itself, namely, that others are capable of reasoning and feeling just as we do. Jesus tells us how we could be dealing with unchristian attitude and behavior in our communities. **Jesus suggests a three-step strategy**: If we truly want to settle a difference with someone, we need to do it **face to face**. If this fails in its purpose, then the second step is to bring another person or persons, those who are wise and gracious rather than those who are hot-tempered or judgmental. The goal is not so much to put the offender on trial, but to persuade the offender to see the wrong and to be reconciled. If this fails, then we must still not give up, but seek the help of the Christian community. Note the emphasis here is **on restoring a broken relationship** by seeking the help of other Christians who hopefully will pray and seek a solution for reconciliation based on Christian love and wisdom, rather than relying on coercive force or threat of legal action, such as a lawsuit see Matthew 18:15-20.

Here the Lord addresses all of us, urging us to listen to his voice. “**If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts**” (Ps.95:1). This call to faithfulness is also a call to the commandment of love that undergirds all of God’s Commandments. The Commandment of love is also the spirit that leads us to correct others when they stray away. Calling others to account when they do wrong or persist in wrongdoing is not easy. We ourselves must be living faithfully before we can call others to change their lives. **We must be a living example**. The bottom line in the message is that we cannot privatize religion, because Christian life is not a private affair between God and me. Such practice of Christian life would lead to a culture of silence before the wrong doing of our brothers and sisters. We are reminded of the obligation to speak up prophetically, to be assertive with humility and as compassionate as Christ.

Finally, brothers and sisters, the message of this Sunday may be summed up in three points: firstly, every one of us is called to a life of **witnessing** before others; secondly, life of witnessing **involves personal conversion to Christ and a deeper relationship with God**; lastly, if we are intimately related to Christ, it is far easier to **invite others to change their way of life**. We pray that God’s grace may strengthen our Christian witnessing; to be God’s instruments with the courage to speak the truth in love. May God give us grace to accept honest and respectful fraternal correction in good faith, so that we can improve ourselves for the greater glory of God. Amen!