

Fr. Jeff's Weekly Homily

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 7, 2008

READING 1: Ezekiel 33: 7-9

Thus says the Lord, You son of man, I have appointed watchman for the house of Israel.

Psalm 95

Today if you hear His voice harden not your hearts.

READING 2: Romans 13:8-10

Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.

GOSPEL: Matthew 18:15-20

Treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.

There is an old Japanese saying that goes: "*Don't walk on my mind with dirty feet.*"

We all know, but we don't always think about it, that human beings are the only creature with the power to decide for ourselves how we are going to feel about reality. Every feeling that we experience begins with a thought and can be understood by thinking it through.

I know that when we hear this Gospel reading, it is easy to feel that we can correct others. It seems Jesus is giving permission to the righteous. Oh, I am sure that the priests and scribes and elders of the people were feeling quite justified as they heard Jesus speak these words. But not his Apostles, not his disciples, certainly not anyone who really knew Jesus and certainly no one who really pays attention to the whole Jesus Gospel can miss his point. Remember Jesus teaches in parables. Parables are memorable because they draw us into the story and then present us with a surprise twist. They are like a good joke.

This Gospel is a parable and the surprising twist comes when Jesus says that if the other person doesn't change and do things the way you think she should, treat her like Gentile or a tax collector. *How did Jesus treat Gentiles?* He fed three thousand of them in one miracle, he cured the Roman soldier's daughter and the Gentile woman's daughter, he spoke with them, and he treated them lovingly. *How did Jesus treat the tax collectors?* He ate and drank with them and he called one of them, Matthew, the

one who recorded this parable for us, to be his Apostle and evangelist.

Through the years, as I listen to a husband or a wife share the process of a divorce, I have learned that I am in the presence of a broken heart. I believe this is sacred space and the hurting heart is looking for rational explanations. So often it comes down to one person feeling the other hasn't conformed to their expectations. Then they decide not to love just like the authorities of old rejected Gentiles and tax collectors.

Jesus was not giving the authorities of his day and not giving the Church permission to bind people in their sins, but to free them and share God's mercy. Remember he said, "Forgive 70 times 7 times"? Oh no, my friends, as Paul's letter to the Romans proclaims, "love is the fulfillment of the law." *Remember?* Love is patient, love is kind, love does not put on airs, it is not arrogant, love does not hold grudges but forgives all things, endures all things, believes all things. Faith, hope, love remain, but the greatest is love.

This Gospel is not about the righteous correcting the sinner. Jesus, God's love enfleshed, is calling upon us to live our lives in integrity with God and do what we think is best for ourselves. Well, you think, that makes sense, yes, I can see that, Jesus is telling me to do what I think is best for me staying true in my own relationship with God. But me telling you, another adult, how to live your life according to my notions, preferences or the way I choose to live?; oh no, my friends, that is selfish, self centered, arrogant and definitely not what Jesus would tell us to do. Jesus is God's watchman (not me and not you) and that is good news!

*Fr. Jeff McGowan
Queen of Peace Catholic Community
Gainesville, Florida*