

Twenty Third, Sunday Ordinary Time (A) Brotherly Love

The name Philadelphia means “brotherly love.” It is a beautiful name, but today’s readings ask us to consider what brotherly love truly means. Is it simply being pleasant to one another? Is it avoiding every difficult conversation? Or is it something deeper: willing the real and lasting good of another person?

Saint Paul gives us the heart of the answer in the Letter to the Romans: “Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another.” He tells us that the commandments are fulfilled in this one command: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Saint Thomas Aquinas described love as willing the good of the other. To love someone, then, is not merely to want that person to feel comfortable. It is to desire that person’s good, dignity, holiness, and salvation.

That is why today’s readings speak about fraternal correction. Fraternal correction means helping a brother or sister turn away from what harms his or her life with God. It is not meddling. It is not controlling. It is not finding fault. It is an act of charity when it is offered with humility, truth, and mercy.

The prophet Ezekiel is appointed as a watchman for the house of Israel. A watchman sees danger and gives a warning. If we see someone we love walking toward what will wound that person, love does not simply look away. Cain once asked God, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Today’s reading gives us the answer: yes. In the family of God, we are responsible for one another.

But the question is important: How do we correct another person with charity? Jesus gives us a clear and simple path in today’s Gospel.

First, begin with prayer and self-examination. Before speaking to another person, we should ask the Lord to examine our own hearts. Am I speaking because I am irritated, hurt, or eager to show that I am right? Or am I truly seeking the good of this person? Have I prayed for him or her? Have I asked the Holy Spirit for the right words and the right time? Correction must never come from pride. It must come from love.

Second, speak directly and privately. Jesus says, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.” We do not begin by speaking about someone. We begin by speaking to that person. We do not expose, embarrass, or gossip. We approach with respect, perhaps saying, “I care about you, and I am concerned.” A private conversation protects dignity and makes room for honesty.

Third, seek to restore, not to win. Jesus says, “If he listens to you, you have won over your brother.” That is the goal: not victory in an argument, but the return of a brother or sister. We must be clear about what is wrong, but we must never use truth as a weapon. A charitable correction names the harmful action while honoring the person. It says, in effect, “You matter to me, and I do not want this to lead you away from the Lord.”

Fourth, when a private conversation is not enough, seek wise help. Jesus tells us to take one or two others along. This is not a group gathered to shame someone. It is a small circle of people who can help establish the truth, offer calm counsel, and support reconciliation. At times, that help may come from a trusted family member, a mature friend, or a priest. The purpose remains the same: healing, not humiliation.

Fifth, persevere in mercy. Jesus speaks of the painful situation in which someone refuses every invitation to reconciliation. Sometimes boundaries are necessary. Yet even then, we must remember how Jesus treated Gentiles and tax collectors: He sought them out, ate with them, loved them, and called them to conversion. Christian love never becomes contempt. It never closes the door to repentance. It continues to pray and to hope.

There is one more part of this Gospel that each of us must remember: we must also be willing to receive correction. The Psalm says, “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” God sometimes speaks to us through a spouse, a parent, a friend, a fellow parishioner, or a priest. It can be difficult to hear that we have caused hurt or chosen a wrong path. But a humble heart can receive loving correction as a gift—a gift that calls us back to truth, freedom, and grace.

Finally, Jesus promises, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” That promise must guide every difficult conversation. We need the presence of Christ: to give us courage without harshness, truth without cruelty, humility without fear, and forgiveness without keeping score.

Let us ask the Lord to make our homes, our parish, and our community places of true brotherly love. May we pray before we speak, speak privately and gently, seek healing rather than victory, ask for wise help when it is needed, and never stop hoping for one another’s return to the Lord. Then we will love as Christ loves: with truth, mercy, and a heart always open to reconciliation.

Las lecturas de este domingo nos enseñan que el verdadero amor fraterno busca el bien de la otra persona. Amar no consiste solamente en ser amables o evitar conflictos, sino también en ayudar al hermano o hermana a volver al camino de Dios cuando se aleja.

La corrección fraterna debe hacerse siempre con caridad, humildad y misericordia. Primero debemos orar y examinar nuestro propio corazón: no podemos corregir desde el enojo, el orgullo o el deseo de tener la razón. Después, debemos hablar directamente y en privado, sin chismes ni humillaciones. El objetivo no es ganar una discusión, sino restaurar a la persona y cuidar su dignidad.

Si una conversación privada no es suficiente, podemos buscar ayuda prudente y madura. Pero nunca debemos cerrar la puerta a la reconciliación. También debemos estar dispuestos a recibir corrección con un corazón humilde. Que Cristo nos conceda hablar con verdad y ternura, perdonar generosamente y amar como Él nos ama.