

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA, MUMBLES

Reflection for

Twenty-Third Sunday (A), September 6, 2020

(May be used for Home Prayer Service)

Dominican Friars, Swansea

This reflection may be used during the home prayer service. Please see the home prayer service sheet for details.

TO LIVE IN PEACE IS TO LIVE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Our blessed Lord understands the inner human struggles we contend with. The inner struggle for greatness was noticeable even among Jesus' disciples. Being aware that conflicts would arise in his Church among fellow believers, Jesus instructs the Church on how to resolve Christian conflicts.

What Christian Charity Demands: When disputes arise among believers, Christian charity requires that we relate our concerns to those involved. Christ sees this as the simplest human way to reconciliation. This one-to-one approach to resolving issues is a practical expression of St Paul's instruction on conflict resolution. The apostle teaches that our anger should not linger for too long lest it causes us to sin (Eph 4:26-27). This means that not all anger is sinful and harmful. When we become angry with our neighbour, God wants us to be reconciled before the day ends. Else, the rift grows into resentment and hatred for the other.

The Psalmist also calls us to examine our consciences before going to bed in order to be reconciled to God and our neighbours and so live in peace (Ps 4:4). Similarly, when we point out the shortcomings of peoples to them in love, we are not passing judgements on them. Rather, we serve as sentries who look out for their fellow wayfarers on the journey of faith. Just like Ezekiel in the First Reading (Ez 33:7-9), we are also responsible for the salvation of those whom God has placed around us.

The Witness of Two or Three: However, some conflicts may require the involvement of witnesses who may also serve as advocates for each party. The reference to 'two or three witnesses' alludes to the Old Testament which states that the witness of two or three is needed to sustain a charge (Deut 19:15). At *Confiteor* which we pray at the beginning of the Holy Mass, we ask our brothers and sisters to pray for us as we ask for God's mercy. In the New Israel, the Church of Christ, we become witnesses to the divine mercy which we all plead for.

The Church Reconciles Us to God and to One Another: Christ as well gave authority to the Church to reconcile dissents among believers. This is because all authority has been given to him (Mt 28:18). When the previous approaches do not yield the expected results, the Church comes in with the authority of Christ to restore peace. The instruction to report disputes to the Church teaches that Christians are to settle their disputes among themselves (cf. 1 Cor 6:1-8). Thus, Christ gave power to the Church to reconcile believers to one another.

The Universal Church and Particular Churches: In Mt 16:19, Christ gave Peter the powers of the keys. Here, in Mt 18:18, he gives the authority to forgive sins to the other apostles. While the Pope has authority over the universal Church, bishops have authority over the particular churches (dioceses) which have been entrusted to their care and over which they exercise pastoral government. While the Pope is the principle of unity of the bishops and the faithful, individual bishops are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 23). Hence, bishops, and priests who have the faculty can also forgive sins (The Code of Canon Law, 969#1) and reconcile believers to God and their fellow humans. If the Church asks for forgiveness for her children in the name of Jesus, it will surely be done by the Father (Mt 18:19).

We Gather in Jesus' Name: Matthew had earlier referred to Jesus as the Emmanuel, God with us (Mt 1:23). Jesus reiterates this promise in assuring us that he is with us when we engage in mission (Mt 28:20) or identify with the poor (Mt 25:31-46), or come together to pray (Mt 18:20). When we gather to pray as a family, which is a domestic church or to celebrate the liturgy, we are assured of the lasting presence of Jesus. His presence guarantees the efficacy of our prayer and also strengthens the bonds which unite us. May we experience the presence of God in our lives and live in peace with our brethren as we strive towards heaven. Amen.