

## September 7, 2014 - 23rd SUNDAY IN OT

I want to begin by thanking those of you who told me that my homily last weekend really touched you. I think that it's good for us to hear about the suffering of others, especially when their response to that suffering is faith-filled. It also helps us to put our own struggles into perspective; not to diminish them, but to give us courage and hope.

This week our nation remembers the events of September 11th, 2001. That was a day of terrible suffering and unbelievable horror. But I hope we all remember the incredible heroism of so many. The children born in that year are now thirteen years old. Make sure that they know about the heroes of that day. We need genuine heroes, men and women who understand the meaning of the words of Jesus in last week's Gospel: "If you cling to your life, you will lose it. But if you are willing lose your life for the sake of others, you will save it for eternal life."

St. Paul reminds us today to "owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another." As followers of Jesus we are called to "love our neighbor as ourselves." As Jesus taught us in the parable of the Good Samaritan, our "neighbor" might be someone completely different from ourselves. We can see all too often in the world today what happens when people hate those who are different from themselves. We are taking up a special second collection today for the victims of such violent hate in the Middle East.

Today's first reading speaks of the role of the prophet as a watchman: "If you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way ... I will hold you responsible." Sometimes our love of neighbor has to take the form of speaking out against evil. However, this is often best done by witnessing to the truth, rather than pointing fingers.

This is what Jesus is describing in the Gospel: a process of reconciliation, rather than condemnation. This is what Pope Francis has spoken about again and again. If we are truly motivated by love, then the way in which we call back the straying and bear witness to the truth must be the way of the Good Shepherd, the way of mercy and love.

The Gospel for this Sunday ends with a beautiful promise made by Jesus: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." Of course, this doesn't mean that Jesus is not with us

when we are alone. But there is something special about disciples of Jesus gathering in his name. How often have we asked someone to pray with us? How beautiful it is when friends, or spouses, or parents with their children, pray together.

Our prayer together in this church in the Holy Mass has irreplaceable value. I just visited two elderly women who worked hard to build this church in which we gather. It was heartbreaking - and inspiring - to hear them talk about their longing to be able to attend Mass here again.

Sometimes we can take for granted what a blessing it is to be able to come to the celebration of Mass. What a privilege we have! To have our Risen Lord among us in the Holy Eucharist, and to actually be able to receive him into our bodies and souls, is such a profound gift.

As we prepare to approach the awesome mystery at the heart of the Mass, let us include in our thoughts and prayers all those who cannot be with us: the sick, the homebound, and those in nursing homes. And let us also pray for those who can and should be here with us, yet choose not to. As each of us is called to be a "watchman" for the Lord, let us reach out to them out of "the debt we owe to love each other." Let us warmly invite them to gather with us around this holy Table.