

**READINGS AND REFLECTION  
FOR THE 23rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

<https://www.catholicbishops.ie/readings/?feature=sunday>

***Scripture theme***

*These three readings deal with the theme of neighbourly correction. This is a difficult art and can only be exercised through genuine love and the purest of motives. We have to learn to help and heal each other. In this we have to avoid attitudes of prying, denunciation, jealousy and informing. The Gospels give us a spirit and a procedure to guide us.*

**FIRST READING**

**A READING FROM THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL      33:7-9**

*If you do not speak to warn the wicked man  
I will hold you responsible for his death.*

The word of the Lord was addressed to me as follows:

“Son of man, I have appointed you as sentry to the House of Israel.

When you hear a word from my mouth, warn them in my name.

If I say to a wicked man: ‘Wicked wretch, you are to die’

and you do not warn the wicked man to renounce his ways,

then he shall die for his sin,

but I will hold you responsible for his death.

If, however, you do warn a wicked man to renounce his ways and repent,

and he does not repent, then he shall die for his sin,

but you yourself will have saved your life.”

The Word of the Lord.



**RESPONSORIAL PSALM**      *Ps 94: 1-2. 6-9. R: v8*

Come, ring out our joy to the Lord; hail the rock who saves us.  
Let us come before him, giving thanks,  
with songs let us hail the Lord.

***O that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your hearts.***

Come in; let us bow and bend low;  
let us kneel before the God who made us  
for he is our God and we the people who belong to his pasture,  
the flock that is led by his hand.

***O that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your hearts.***

O that today you would listen to his voice!  
'Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, as on that day at Massah in the desert  
when your fathers put me to the test;  
when they tried me, though they saw my work.'

***O that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your hearts.***

**SECOND READING**

**A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE ROMANS 13:8-10**

*Love is the answer to every one of the commandments.*

Avoid getting into debt, except the debt of mutual love.

If you love your fellow men  
you have carried out your obligations.

All the commandments:

You shall not commit adultery,  
you shall not kill,  
you shall not steal,  
you shall not covet, and so on,

are summed up in this single command:

You must love your neighbour as yourself.

Love is the one thing that cannot hurt your neighbour;  
that is why it is the answer to every one of the commandments.



The Word of the Lord.

Your word is truth, O Lord, consecrate us in the truth.  
*Jn 17: 17*

## GOSPEL

### **A READING FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW 18:15-20**

*If he listens to you, you have won back your brother.*

Jesus said to his disciples:

'If your brother does something wrong,  
go and have it out with him alone - between your two selves.



If he listens to you,  
you have won back your brother.  
If he does not listen,  
take one or two others along with you:  
the evidence of two or three witnesses  
is required to sustain any charge.  
But if he refuses to listen to these,  
report it to the community;  
and if he refuses to listen to the community,  
treat him like a pagan or a tax collector.

'I tell you solemnly,  
whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven;  
whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.  
'I tell you solemnly once again,  
if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all,  
it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven.  
For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

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## REFLECTION

from Patricia Stevenson, *Josephite*

Today's readings approach how we deal with one another's poor choices. How do we help one another in terms of the Kingdom, not in terms of populist condemnatory approaches to crime and punishment? What can we learn for dealing with issues such as these in our personal lives, society and in our Church?

Ezekiel was a deportee to Babylon around 597 BC. He was the first prophet to receive his call in exile. He had been a priest and in Babylon became a spiritual watchman for Israel. Watchmen are essential in every society for giving early warnings about danger. 'The blast of the trumpet' in earlier societies called for no delay; if anyone died, it was the responsibility of the watchman. Ezekiel knew God expected him to warn the people of the danger to their faith from their exile. Ezekiel had grave responsibilities to warn the people but they were free to listen or not to listen.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus gave spiritual direction in the context of rifts between family members. Matthew does not present Jesus appealing to a hierarchical family authority structure with members over members as the model for the resolution of conflict. Rather, reflecting the communitarian unity of the Trinity, Matthew's starting point for spiritual correction is the truth that we all are brothers and sisters.

Care for 'little ones' and for the lost sheep are Matthew's special concerns.

Correction or discipline which gives scandal or lacks concern for the 'little ones' – the spiritually frail, the naïve or the newcomers - brings condemnation. As well, let not the process of the restoration of 'the lost' be an occasion for added uncalled-for pain for anyone. Matthew's situates the process for discernment and resolution within the group's need to be praying for unity. The group is challenged to be open to how the Holy Spirit is actively leading all to truth, healing and restoration.

Having grasped the importance of reconciliation, Peter asked, "How many times should I forgive a brother who has offended me?...Seven times?"

Jesus replies, "Not seven, but *four hundred and ninety* times!"

Forgiveness is not a numbers game but a sign of the kingdom. God does not keep scores. Jesus calls us to choose love above all things.

from <http://sosj.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/23<sup>rd</sup> SundayOrdinaryTime-YearA.pdf>