



TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Many adult children learned early that conflict was dangerous. We became skilled at reading the room, keeping the peace, softening what we really thought, or avoiding difficult conversations altogether. Others learned the opposite and became direct in ways that could feel sharp or controlling. Recovery invites us to discover a more honest and loving way of relating.

This Sunday's readings speak directly to that work. In the first reading, the Lord appoints Ezekiel as a watchman and tells him to warn others when danger is near (Ezekiel 33:7–9). In Sunday's gospel, Jesus offers a clear process for addressing harm: *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone"* (Matthew 18:15).

Jesus does not tell us to suppress what happened, pretend everything is fine, or talk to everyone except the person involved. He begins with a direct and private conversation. The purpose is not to shame or win. Jesus says, *"If he listens to you, you have won over your brother"* (Matthew 18:15). The goal is restoration.

For adult children, this can be challenging. Speaking honestly may awaken old fears: What if they become angry? What if they reject me? What if I am misunderstood? We may feel responsible for protecting another person from discomfort, even when doing so requires us to abandon our own experience. Silence can feel safer than truth.

Recovery teaches us that direct communication is not the same as aggression. We can name what happened, explain how it affected us, and state what we need without attacking someone's character. We can also establish a boundary without demanding that the other person agree with it. Their reaction belongs to them.

Receiving correction can be just as difficult. If criticism in childhood came with shame, ridicule, or withdrawal of affection, even gentle feedback can feel threatening. We may immediately defend ourselves, collapse into guilt, or assume that a mistake means something is wrong with us. Recovery allows us to slow that reaction. We can ask whether there is truth in what we are hearing without turning correction into condemnation.

Saint Paul gives us the standard in the second reading: *"Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law"* (Romans 13:10). Love does not require us to disappear. Neither does honesty give us permission to be cruel. Mature relationships make room for truth, dignity, boundaries, and repair.

This is why fellowship matters. Jesus promises, *"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18:20). Healthy recovery relationships give us a place to practice being known without performing, speaking honestly without managing every reaction, and receiving feedback without assuming rejection. We can learn that disagreement is survivable and repair is possible.

Sometimes our work is to find the courage to speak. Sometimes it is to listen without becoming defensive or ashamed. At other times, it is to recognize that we have become overly responsible for fixing a relationship after we have already spoken clearly and respectfully.

Christ is present in these difficult moments. He teaches us that conflict does not always mean abandonment and that another person's disappointment does not determine our

worth. We can tell the truth without losing ourselves, and we can hear the truth without collapsing into shame.

Recovery gives us a new way to relate. We do not have to choose between silence and control, or between keeping the peace and speaking honestly. With Christ in our midst, truth and love can remain together, making room for relationships rooted in dignity, freedom, and grace.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What fear tends to surface when you consider speaking honestly about hurt, conflict, or a boundary?
- How do you typically respond to correction: defensiveness, shame, people-pleasing, withdrawal, or something else?
- Where might Christ be inviting you to practice direct, loving communication without taking responsibility for the other person's reaction?

MASS READINGS

FIRST READING Ezekiel 33:7–9

RESP. PS. Psalm 95:1–2, 6–7, 8–9

SECOND READING Romans 13:8–10

GOSPEL Matthew 18:15–20