

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Most of us who love someone struggling with addiction have faced a difficult question: when should we speak, and when should we step back? We may worry that saying too much will push someone away, while saying too little feels like silence in the face of something harmful. Family recovery teaches us that love requires both honesty and humility.

This Sunday's readings bring that tension into focus. 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 gives His disciples 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).

Notice what Jesus does not say. He does not tell us to shame, lecture, gather allies, or repeat ourselves until the other person finally agrees. He begins with a direct and private conversation. The goal is not control. Jesus says, *"If he listens to you, you have won over your brother"* (Matthew 18:15). The purpose is restoration.

This matters deeply in family recovery. We are often tempted toward one of two extremes. We may avoid honest conversations because we fear conflict, rejection, or another crisis. Or we may become so focused on changing the other person that every conversation turns into persuasion, monitoring, or pressure. Neither approach leads to peace. One leaves important truth unspoken; the other places us back in the exhausting role of trying to make another person change.

Speaking truth with love means being clear about what we see, what we have experienced, and what we can or cannot participate in. It may mean naming the impact of broken trust, refusing to cover consequences, or setting a boundary

around behavior that is harmful. It may also mean allowing the other person to disagree, become upset, or refuse the help we hope they will accept.

That is where humility enters. We are responsible for speaking honestly and acting faithfully. We are not responsible for producing another person's willingness. Once we have said what needs to be said, recovery invites us to release the outcome to God. Repeating the same warning, checking for compliance, or trying to force change can become another form of control.

Saint Paul gives us a helpful measure in the second reading: *"Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law"* (Romans 13:10). Love is not the same as keeping everyone comfortable. At times, love tells the truth. At other times, love steps back and allows consequences to unfold. Healthy boundaries are not punishments. They can be one way of refusing to participate in patterns that keep everyone stuck.

Jesus also reminds us that we are not meant to carry this alone. *"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18:20). Family recovery gives us a fellowship where we can test our motives, receive perspective, and learn from others who understand the pull between helping and controlling.

Sometimes we need courage to speak. Sometimes we need restraint after we have spoken. Sometimes we are the ones who need to hear that our own fear, rescuing, or resentment has become part of the problem. Recovery makes room for all of these truths.

Christ is present when honesty and mercy remain together. We cannot save or fix the people we love, but we can speak truthfully, act with integrity, and entrust them to the One who can reach places in them that we cannot.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where are you currently tempted either to avoid an honest conversation or to keep repeating yourself in an effort to force change?

- How can you tell the difference between speaking truth in love and trying to control another person's recovery?

- What outcome connected to someone you love are you being invited to release more fully into God's care?

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