

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Secrecy gives lust much of its power. When thoughts, fantasies, behaviors, and compromises remain hidden, they can grow without challenge. Recovery begins to weaken that power by bringing what is hidden into the light. This Sunday's readings remind us that truth spoken in love is not meant to shame us. It is meant to call us back to freedom.

In the first reading, the Lord appoints Ezekiel as a watchman and gives him responsibility to warn others when danger is near (Ezekiel 33:7–9). In Sunday's gospel, Jesus teaches His disciples how to address sin directly: *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone"* (Matthew 18:15).

Jesus begins with a private conversation. There is no public humiliation, gossip, or attempt to destroy another person's dignity. The goal is restoration. He says, *"If he listens to you, you have won over your brother"* (Matthew 18:15). Correction, when rooted in love, is an invitation back into truth and relationship.

This is essential in recovery from lust addiction. We need people who are willing to notice when we are drifting and who have permission to say something. A sponsor, accountability partner, priest, counselor, spouse, or trusted friend may see defensiveness, isolation, rationalization, or secrecy before we are ready to admit it. Their words can feel intrusive when part of us still wants to protect the addiction.

Receiving correction requires humility. Lust trains us to hide, minimize, and compartmentalize. We may tell ourselves that a fantasy is harmless, a private behavior affects no one else, or a small compromise is not worth mentioning. Recovery asks us to resist that instinct. When someone we trust raises a concern, we pause before defending ourselves and ask whether there is something we need to see more clearly.

Accountability, however, is not surveillance. Another person cannot manage our recovery for us. We can install safeguards, share honestly, and invite direct questions, but no system can replace our own willingness to live in the light. The goal is not to become better at avoiding consequences. It is to become the kind of person who no longer needs a hidden life.

Saint Paul gives us the measure for both correction and accountability in the second reading: *"Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law"* (Romans 13:10). Truth without love can become humiliation. Love without truth can become permission to remain unchanged. Mature recovery holds both together.

This also shapes the way we respond when another person in recovery is struggling. Fellowship is not a place for comparison or moral superiority. We remember our own vulnerability. We speak honestly when needed, but with the humility of people who know how quickly secrecy and self-deception can return.

Jesus promises, *"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18:20). That promise gives deeper meaning to recovery fellowship. Christ is present when we gather honestly, confess what we would rather hide, encourage one another, and allow someone else to challenge us when our thinking begins to drift.

Sometimes freedom requires us to speak before secrecy grows. Sometimes it requires us to listen without defending ourselves. Recovery becomes stronger when we stop treating accountability as punishment and begin receiving it as a form of love.

Christ does not bring hidden things into the light to destroy us. He brings them into the light so they can be healed. We cannot recover in isolation, but together we can help one another remain honest, connected, and pointed toward the One who restores us to wholeness.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What thought, fantasy, behavior, or compromise are you most tempted to minimize or keep hidden?

- Who currently has permission to challenge you when they notice secrecy, isolation, or rationalization beginning to return?

- How might you receive accountability more as an act of love and less as a threat to your privacy or independence?

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