



Owe nothing to anyone, except to

*love one  
another.*

Romans 13:8

# Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 6, 2020

## A HIGHER STANDARD

Our culture tempts us to think that any action is allowed as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else. Today's readings show us how sadly narrow-minded that thinking is. They call us to a much higher standard, one that recognizes the majestic dignity of each human person. Ezekiel reminds us that the wicked acts of one person always affect the whole human community. Even if the sin is a private one, we are all responsible for shining light into the darkness. Matthew's Gospel echoes this idea, providing practical tips for bringing healing and reconciliation to sinful or broken relationships. Today's readings also show us the deep implications of sin: a failure to love. Saint Paul urges us to avoid sin and obey the law. The best way to do this, he professes, is to love. Love leads us from mere coexistence to genuine companionship.

## THE WAY OF LOVE

Although today's readings might seem drearily preoccupied with sin, Saint Paul explains why sin is important to discuss: because every sin reduces the amount of love in the world. Paul turns the focus from sin to love when he writes, "Love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). What power that verse contains! If we begin each day by reciting that verse, we would be well on our way to a more generous life—not only avoiding sin as much as possible, but also actively seeking out ways to make life sweeter for our neighbors. Memorized verses inspire us when we face difficulties during the day, when we are irritated with someone, for example, or we need to make a decision. Remembering that "love is the fulfillment of the law" might truly help us avoid sin and do good in daily life.

## THE WAY OF PRAYER

Learning a scripture verse by heart is, of course, a way of praying. In today's Gospel, Jesus encourages us to pray. Jesus firmly believes in the power of prayer, going so far as to guarantee results: "I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father." Jesus promises something else, too, something vitally important. More than a game of Go Fish in which we hope we "got what we asked for," prayer is a living encounter with Jesus himself: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Today's readings move us beyond the bare minimum and open an enormous world to us. We shun the pettiness of sin not because we fear punishment, but because we want to love others deeply. We pray to our great God not because we want to get favors from a divine vending machine, but because we want to spend time with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

## TODAY'S READINGS

Ezekiel 33:7–9

Psalms 95:1–2, 6–9

Romans 13:8–10

Matthew 18:15–20

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