

ORDINARY SUNDAY XXIII "A"
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Ezekiel, St. Paul and Jesus today each address the place of reconciliation in our lives of discipleship. A recent letter to a newspaper advice columnist I read speaks directly to the issue.

The writer described overhearing her mother-in-law make a comment about her to another person which was hurtful. Rather than harbor a grudge and/or seek revenge, the writer found a time to sit down with her mother-in-law after her initial emotional response had died down. With her mother-in-law she calmly recounted the incident, what she had heard, and how hurtful the comment had been. Her mother-in-law was deeply moved by the honesty and loving way her daughter-in-law approached her and chose to handle the situation. The mother-in-law immediately apologized for her behavior, developed a process for better and open communication between them, and the letter writer concluded, have developed a healthy open relationship with each other.

As Christians, while each of us has, and needs to continually grow, a personal relationship with Jesus, Christianity is not a private individual spirituality, but a following of Jesus lived with others in community. Baptism brings us into relationship with Jesus **and** makes us members of his corporate risen presence (his body) the community of the church in the world. There is no Christianity without the church. In today's gospel Jesus acknowledges a simple human fact, that in the church as in any relationship between persons, be they spouses, siblings, parents and children, friend and friend, co-workers, teammates, inevitable times of conflict will arise due to the fact of the uniqueness and giftedness of every person. How we handle these rifts indicates how well we understand and follow Jesus.

For a faithful Christian, (as well as any healthy mature person) a rift in a relationship with another person or group of people cannot simply be ignored. Too much is at stake. If we truly believe that each of us individually, and all of us collectively, are in fact, the "Body of Christ", then rifts in relationships between members of the church are actually rifts in the relationship with Jesus himself, present in the person of each other. Not

honestly facing whatever fractures the relationship between myself and another (or others) belies our gathering here at the altar in celebrating the Holy Eucharist in which we proclaim our unity in Jesus and each other, given ritual expression especially through the “Sign of Peace” exchanged before we each come forward in procession to physically receive the ultimate reality of unity and peace, Jesus himself in the act of eating his body and drinking his blood in Holy Communion. Our “Amen” prior to receiving Holy Communion is a profession of faith **both** in the presence of Jesus under the sacramental symbols of bread and wine **and** the presence of Jesus in my life and in the lives of all those who share this sacramental act with me, indeed the whole human family for whom Jesus died and rose.

The authority of “binding and loosing” that was given to Peter in the gospel story two weeks ago, this weekend is extended to each member of the church. The model given by Jesus is that of **subsidiarity**. Subsidiarity means that we do not “buck it up” something to a higher level or authority, when it can, and should, be done at a lower. This is what the letter writer to the newspaper columnist exemplified. Left unconforted and unreconciled, rifts in relationships are like an untreated cancer—eventually they will kill the spirit and soul of an individual, as well as the body of a marriage, a family, a friendship, a team, a parish.

St. Paul reminds us today that we are to owe no debt to one another except the debt to “love one another.” Loving another is not always easy. Loving another does always carry with it warm comforting feelings. God does not call us to just love those who are easy to love, but to love the unloved and the hard-to-love people in our lives and world. Loving another as seen in today’s Scripture readings means facing what divides us and doing the oftentimes hard work of gently, but firmly, confronting each other in the search for common ground and the re-establishment and further growth of relationship. Today’s readings call us to ponder how well each of us is stewarding the treasure of forgiveness proclaimed in the words we utter in the **Lord’s Prayer—“Forgive me/us my/our trespasses as I/we forgive those who trespass against me/us.”** This week, I invite each of us to remind ourselves: “I/we are put here as an ambassador of God’s love.”