

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's readings offer us several insights. However, my homily is going to ask several questions.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul stresses the importance of loving one another. In effect, he tells us love is the one thing we all owe to one another. Although it can be a real struggle to love family and friends, it can be an even greater struggle to know what it means to love our neighbors as ourselves, i.e., to love those who are not family or friends, especially those who are at the margins. If we owe them love, what kind of love do we owe them, and how do we demonstrate that love?

St. Paul provides at least a partial answer: "*Love does no evil to the neighbor,*" which means, at a minimum, keeping the Ten Commandments. The Golden Rule also suggests an answer: "*Do to others whatever you would have them do to you*" [Mt. 7:12]. For example, if I was a marginalized person because of poverty or homelessness, what would I want done to or for me? In other words, to answer the question, we have to put ourselves in the shoes of a marginalized person.

Over the years, working with couples planning to be married, I have learned that some couples who generally communicate well do not have good conflict resolution skills. In today's Gospel, Jesus offers a process to resolve disagreements and conflicts within in the Church. If possible, people should work out their problems between themselves. Only if that does not work should a person gradually involve more people to try to solve the problem. Is that how we handle disagreements and conflicts, or do we immediately escalate them? It seems to me that social media causes or encourages us to turn everything into a life or death, all or nothing, conflict.

In today's first reading, God tells Ezekiel that he is to be the watchman for the house of Israel. Ezekiel is told that if he does not warn the Israelites when God tells him something, God will hold him responsible for his failure to fulfill his role. I have never thought much about this passage, but I think it can be applied especially to parents and to Church leaders.

Parents are called to be the watchmen and watchwomen for their children. Frankly, there are few jobs harder than being a good parent. This passage reminds parents that they are called to be parents to their children. Obviously what it means to be a good parent to a small child is radically different from what it means to be a good parent to an adult child or even a teenage child. However, I think the term *watchman* is a good description of the role of parents.

Parents are called to be protectors of their children. When I was growing up, that was a lot easier than it is now. Children are exposed to so much more at such an early age. Parents need to be clear to themselves what their values are and how to convey their values to their children. Since they are co-creators with God, they need to be sure their values are God's values. They need to know how much freedom to give their children at different ages. This is complicated by the differences among children in the same family. What is the role of a watchman or watchwoman in the life of an adult child? These are all challenging and difficult questions.

My brothers and sisters, today's Gospel also offers some of the most hopeful words in the Gospel: "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*" We need always to remember that we are gathered together in his name not only when we are in church or when are praying together. Whenever and wherever Christians are striving to live a Christian life in a family or community, Jesus promises to be present to them, to be present to us.