

HOMILY for 23rd SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel tells us about the steps of reconciliation process, which reminds me of this cute story that I would like to share with you.

One day a boy & his grandparents came to visit a 150-year-old historic Catholic church. As they toured the church, the grandfather explained the reason for some of the architectural & liturgical features, while the boy listened intently. Then they reached the confessional in the back.

"I know what this is!" the boy enthused, "it's for time-out, right?"

Anyway, if there is one thing that would inevitably happen between two people, it would be a disagreement or fight. A friend or neighbor would eventually do something wrong against another or step on the other's toes. That is why fights & conflicts have happened throughout human history beginning with the deadly fight between Cain & Abel. In fact, the world is currently on fire as we see conflicts happen in the Middle East between US-Israel & Iran-all their proxy groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, & so on; in Ukraine between Ukraine & Russia; in Sudan between Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) & Rapid Support Forces (RSF); in Congo between M23 rebel group & Rwanda; or right here in the US between Democrats & Republicans.

Realizing those endless fights & conflicts with deadly consequences in our human family, Jesus wants to reconcile the two fighting parties & bring healing & peace to our broken world. In this Sunday's Gospel, He proposes the reconciling process step by step for us. First, He tells us to go & let the other party about one's wrongful act hoping that the two parties would reconcile & settle the differences. But, we all know that reconciliation does not happen that easily. Nowadays, people do not even agree on what is the truth. On the contrary, they cook up fake information to support their side without any regard to the truth & the need for reconciliation. Next, we could invite the third party to witness & mediate the reconciling discussion. If that does not work, we must refer the discussion to the Church. The reason why two fighting parties should involve the Church is because hopefully they would respect the Church & judging power of God to make peace with one another. Unfortunately, the world continues to be more secularized & looks down on institutions such as the Church. So, the last thing that we are supposed to do in reconciliation is to treat the opposing party like a gentile or tax collector. In other words, we should deal with the opposing party like a normal human being by showing respect & the potential for conversion. Those are the basic steps of the reconciliation & peace plan in dealing with fights & conflicts.

Unfortunately, most fighting parties do not follow that suggestive plan of reconciliation & peace. That is why we continue to see fights & conflicts happen all over the world. People have kept violating one Commandment after another as Paul listed some of the most notorious sins in today's Second Reading for us. He said, "You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet." Surely the whole world has committed all those Commandments & created one conflict after another against its neighbors. It seems like everyone is not interested in peace & love anymore as we see a dividing situation in our country & a fractured state of the world right now. Many Christians have engaged in all sorts of fights & conflicts as a righteous warrior or an indignant judge who wants to settle score with an evil & sinful world. We Christians have forgotten that our assigned mission is to make peace &

convert the world back to God. We Christians are not called to judge & condemn the world no matter what. That is why Jesus has suggested to us the reconciliation & peace plan in today's Gospel.

Meanwhile, in today's First Reading, prophet Ezekiel reminds us of the duty that the Lord has assigned us to do as the following, "...When you hear me say anything, you shall warn them for me. If I tell the wicked man that he shall surely die, & you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked man from his way, he shall die for his guilt; but I will hold you responsible for his death. But, if you warn the wicked man, trying to turn him from his way, he shall die for his guilt, but you shall save yourself." As you can see, our job is to help our wicked world to change its way of life & convert back to God. We are not called to be the judge or the executioner of our wicked world. So, let us leave that judging job to God & try to bring reconciliation & peace to our broken world.

In case we have not got the point that Jesus wants us to do with the suggestive reconciliation & peace plan in today's Gospel or the mission that He calls us to carry out with the His death on the Cross, Paul wants to remind us with this message in today's Second Reading, "...All [the laws & Commandments] are summed up in this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love never does any wrong to the neighbor, hence love is the fulfillment of the Law." Paul evidently believes that we owe love to our neighbors. If we do that, we have already fulfilled all the laws & Commandments. That is why we need to find every possible way to reconcile & convert our neighbors back to God. That is why it is sinful & evil when our political leaders threaten their enemies or people that they do not like with killing & all sorts of severe punishments. When leaders & their followers constantly call for violent acts & promote hate & division, it is absolutely contrary to the divine will & plan of salvation. Don't believe me, just look up to the Cross of Jesus to see if He wants to reconcile us with God the Father or condemn us. That is why it is terribly wrong to see Christians pursue anything else other than reconciliation & conversion of the world.

My dear brothers & sisters, are you the reconciler & peacemaker? Or, are you the instigator & agitator? Hopefully we would look up to Jesus & follow His example to bring reconciliation & peace to our broken world. That way we will help end all the current conflicts & build up a peaceful & loving world.