

Fraternal Correction

Reverend Robert Gillelan

September 5, 2026

In tonight's Gospel, Jesus is talking about fraternal correction - fraternal correction directed toward repentance. And boy, is that a touching subject today.

We also heard in our first reading that even in the Old Testament, in the Jewish faith, a fraternal correction of someone who was sinning was a commandment given by God. What did God say to Ezekiel?

If an evil man dies, he will die because of his guilt, but if you don't correct him, I'm going to hold you also responsible. So these readings tonight tell us that there is a responsibility on the part of us as Christians to lovingly - let's underscore that - lovingly, correct and help one another when we have gone astray.

And that's the goal here. You know, this kind of correction today might get the response to someone who'd say, "Don't push your morals on me." Or, "Jesus said don't judge." Well, Jesus just said that we are supposed to use the faculty of judgment to know when someone sins against us or has gone astray in the faith, and it's our responsibility to help, to bring them back. This is not about weaponizing religion, as you would hear today.

This is about love, because love is to will the good of the other, as St. Thomas Aquinas has told us numerous times.

And willing the good of the other is to bring the sinner back onto the path of righteousness. And so we know from our Church history that the Church has been exercising this discipline of fraternal correction in various ways and forms throughout the millennia.

Some of the things that the Church has had to confront have been those three really big sins of heresy, apostasy, and schism. And all three of those big-time sins are still with us today and require our vigilance and, at times, the Church's correction.

And notice that Jesus doesn't say, "Do your best to - do what you can to correct someone." Jesus actually gives us a plan. He gives us an outline of how to do it.

The first thing He says, if someone sins against you, or in the broader sense of the Church, you know that someone is seriously - has seriously fallen into sin, what do we do? Do we go online and announce it to everyone?

No. We first go to the person directly and personally and bring the matter to their attention. Privately.

Not publicly. Not online.

In person. Directly. In charity.

If bringing this matter to their attention doesn't seem to help them, doesn't seem to do any good to change their mind and their heart, then we take some other people along with us - with us - like-minded believers, which today we might call an intervention.

We do an intervention to help these people again to see that perhaps they are in the wrong here, and perhaps they do need a bit of correction. And if they don't listen after the intervention, then we can take it to the Church.

We have seen the Church's response to these serious sins down through the past 2,000 years: heresy, officially the obstinate denial of a truth to be believed by Catholic faith. In the early Church, some of the heresies were about the nature of Jesus Christ.

Some would be heretical because they said He isn't fully human. Others over here would say, "Well, He's not fully divine." And so the Church had to deal with that.

Those kind of heresies led to, um, proclamations and creeds and dogmas. Bishop Barron says those kind of heresies are still with us today, but are with us more regarding the nature of our humanity.

Often these heresies are the secular ideologies that deny the truth about our relationship with God and with one another, and the true nature of our humanity. He tells us we need to be on guard so that they do not infect our core beliefs as Catholics.

Heresy, apostasy. Apostasy is the total repudiation of the Christian faith.

In the early Church, that was a really big deal because when Christians were under persecution, they would apostatize. Some would repudiate their faith.

The emperor would say, "Renounce your faith or die." And so they would renounce their faith as Christians. If you want a really good movie on that, probably not best for children, but great for adults, the movie *Silence*, about missionaries in Japan.

Apostasy. And then schism: the refusal of submission to the pope. Here we have an example of what Jesus said, that if you've tried to speak with people one-on-one, and if you've done an intervention and they still do not have a change of mind and heart, they may need to be

excommunicated from the faith community, not primarily as a punishment, but primarily as a medicinal response, driving them out from the community, separating them from the community of faith, like a great big time out, to give them the time to think about what they've done and hopefully inspire a bit of conversion. So excommunication directed towards a change of mind and heart.

We recently had an example of excommunication, did we not? When Pope Leo excommunicated, recently, the bishop from the Society of St. Pius X, who attempted to ordain four or five new bishops against the direction of our Holy Father. And he excommunicated them all because they refused to submit to the pope.

You know, today I think people look at that sort of thing and can have a very wrong judgment about the Catholic Church, saying that we're weaponizing religion. Well, we're not weaponizing anything.

We're doing exactly what Jesus said to do in the Bible, in the Gospels. And sometimes excommunication is needed not only to give the sinner the time to convert, but also to protect the integrity and the deposit of faith of the rest of the faithful.

So we're following Jesus's instructions when we try to guide people back on track one-on-one, when we do interventions, or when we need the help of the Church to solve some of life's more difficult problems. And so in the end, we have these disciplines that, you know, some of them are even outlined in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. And when we think of Canon Law, we don't think of love, but we should think of love and salvation.

The Code of Canon Law directs us how to give expression to fraternal correction in our minds. And its motto is *Salus Animarum Suprema Lex*.

The Latin scholars among us know that that means the salvation of souls is the supreme law. So as Catholics, we celebrate the law as an instrument of salvation.

So let us pray that the Lord may give us the wisdom to know when to exercise fraternal correction, and may He give us the courage and the charity to do it following His teaching.

Homily text prepared from an audio transcript. Minor punctuation, paragraphing, grammar, and obvious transcription corrections were made for readability while preserving Father Bob's wording.