

## 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Homily: Based on Ezek 33:7-9, Rom 13:8-10 and Mt 18:15-20**

**“Breaking the chains of our ego and pride, and in humility and gentleness, reach out to the lost ones!”**

This incident happened on a Friday and the scene is over a small hillock. The mid-day sun shining bright and hot but preparing itself to slowly fade into darkness and tepidity. There were few people standing around. Some indifferent ones gazing from far. Some proud ones standing on the ground. Some broken ones on their knees. Three were suspended on the Cross. One of them...in Excruciating Pain, yet Majestic and Glorious in His Character and Nobility...With a disposition of Graciousness and Goodness, spelled out into a loud, yet compassionate exclamation: “Father, forgive them...they know not what they do.”

Dear friends, this cry of the Son of God – Jesus – from the Cross to His Father, on behalf of the sinful & strayed humanity... was a statement that summarized His life-long mission: To forgive, to bring back the lost & to give hope to the strayed ones!

The Gospel of the Day presents this teaching of the Lord, which He lived in His life and perfectly climaxed on the Cross: To forgive, to bring back the lost and to give hope to the strayed ones!

Last Sunday, the Gospel exhorted us to “deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him” (Mt 16:24). This exhortation is given a practical dimension in today’s Gospel with a strong accent on the need to grow ourselves in the aspect of Active Forgiveness and to make eager and earnest efforts to bring back a lost person and to render hope and optimism to the wayward hearts.

Just a few verses before today's passage, we have in Mt 18: 10-14, the Parable of the Lost Sheep. The shepherd loves all his hundred sheep...yet, when one gets strayed, he makes "an out-of-the-way effort" to get the lost one back. He doesn't give up on the strayed. He doesn't desert the lost. He doesn't abandon the one gone from his circle. This attitude of "taking an extra pain" and "dripping an extra sweat" would seem weird and strange to a calculative, pragmatic and business-minded head of ours, in this modernistic period.

Is it not a waste of time to go after the "lost sheep" – of an obsessed drug-addict or a habitual drunkard or a consistent smoker?

Is it just too futile to awaken a "lost sheep" – of a soul in slumber, where there is no focus on spiritual life, where there is slackness of prayer and sacraments and where worldliness and materialism have crept and conquered?

Is it of any use to go after the "lost sheep" – of a couple who are constantly bickering and a family which is broken up with regular fights and misunderstandings?

Is there any sense in trying to restore the "lost sheep" – of a community whose members seem disinterested, who are lethargic, who have their own personal and hidden agenda and who always back-talk and back-bite?

Is it just not meaningless to revive the "lost sheep" – of a society or a nation where corruption has taken deep-roots in hearts of people and all sincere efforts of transformation often gets dumped into the bin?

The True Shepherd however, in all such situations, of the sheep being lost, makes an extra effort in getting them back. This same Shepherd today invites us, through

the Gospel of the Day, to be partakers in restoring the lost ones. A series of steps are enshrined to make this “seemingly not-so-pleasant” task happen!

1. Engaging in a mutual dialogue
2. Engaging in a small-group interchange
3. Engaging in a communitarian initiative

Why is it a “seemingly not-so-pleasant” task? Mt 18:15 says, “If YOUR brother sins against YOU...” “Can we read it again..... YOUR bro sins against YOU....

Now that sounds crazy, isn’t it?

Why should I...I be doing that?

Someone hurts me...should I go?

Someone wounds me...should I restore?

Someone harms me...should I reconcile?

Someone kills me mentally...should I patch up?

Someone spoils my name...should I take the lead?

Well... the Gospel of the Day...simply says, “If YOUR brother sins against YOU...” Then... **YOU TAKE THE LEAD, TO GET THINGS RIGHT! YES... You!**

But we ask **WHY? WHY ME?!**

This WHY may not get answered so easily or convincingly... But the One who gave this exhortation, makes us to focus our attention back on the small hillock, on the Friday... With the mid-day sun slowly fading into darkness... with hands stretched

on the Cross with deep pain, crying: “Father, forgive them...they know not what they do!” Tough words to hear on a relaxed Sunday, right? What is the reason for Jesus to forgive? He says... “They know not what they do.” Yes ... they are ignorant... it is their weakness... It is their fault. Have pity for them. show compassion to them. Forgive and pray for them.

Dear friends, Christianity is wonderful... but Christianity is also a task! Yes, the Obligation of Sunday duties ought to get actualized and lived in all the other weekdays of our life!

St. Paul tells us in second reading: “Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law!” (Rom 13:8). And in today’s first reading the Lord reminds us through Prophet Ezekiel of the noble yet great responsibility entrusted to us to be accountable to one another: “O you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me!” (Ezek 33:7).

Let’s embrace this task of the Lord... to forgive, to bring back the lost and to give hope to the strayed ones! The Good Shepherd preached it...The Good Shepherd lived it in His life...The Good Shepherd perfected it on the Cross. We, His little Sheep, are now exhorted the same...Let us break the chains of our ego and pride... and in humility and gentleness, reach out to the lost ones!