

Fr. Hans

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As our first reading tells us, we need to “warn the wicked.” The Lord says to Ezekiel, “[if] you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way, the wicked shall die for his guilt, but I will hold you responsible for his death.” God will hold each and every one of us responsible for those to whom we *should* have gone. It is our responsibility to tell other people when they are sinning, and when they are separating themselves from God, from the Church, and from us.

Jesus gives us more specific instructions on how to tell someone they have sinned: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.” Our goal is never to condemn our brother or sister for their sins. No, our goal is to convert them from their sins. This makes it very difficult to confront someone. It’s easy to tell someone they are sinning and that they will go to hell. It is easy to do nothing. It is very, very difficult to find the correct way to speak the truth with love. It is hard to let someone know you love them while at the same time telling them they need to change their ways.

But this is our responsibility, and so we must learn how to do it. How do we tell people both that we love them, and that they are doing something wrong? I wish that I could answer that question, but it is different in every case. There is no single correct answer, because how we speak to someone depends on who we are, who they are, and the relationship established between us.

I know that many, most, and probably all of us have close family or friends who are not walking in God’s ways. We see them living sinful lives, and we want to say something, but we don’t know what to say. The first thing, the very first thing, is to make sure they know we love them, and that we will always love them. As St. Paul reminds us, all of the commandments are summed up in the command to love our neighbor as ourselves.

The second thing is to make sure they know that their actions are harmful. We love them, but we do not like what they are doing, specifically because what they do is hurting themselves and is hurting other people. This is a very difficult conversation, but it is one that some of us need to have. But it is also a conversation many of us have already have, and nothing has changed. How do we proceed if, as Jesus says, “he does not listen to you, he does not listen to others, he does not listen to the Church.”? Jesus again gives us the answer, but it might not be the answer you think it is: “treat him as you would a gentile or a tax collector.” The original Greek says “ἔστω σοι ὡσπερ ὁ ἐθνικός καὶ ὁ τελώνης,” which roughly means “let him be to you as the gentile and the tax-collector.”

How were Gentiles and tax collectors in Jesus's eyes? The Jews would have nothing at all in common with Gentiles; they wouldn't even talk. Tax collectors were worse, as they were considered traitors to their own people. But Jesus's command must be understood in the light of how Jesus himself treated Gentiles and tax collectors. Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus healed the Canaanite woman's daughter because of her faith. Jesus called the tax collector Matthew to be part of his intimate group of disciples. Jesus ate at the house of the tax collector Zacchaeus. How did Jesus treat Gentiles and tax collectors? He ate with them, he spoke with them, he served them, he loved them. He loved them. And in associating with them, he always called them to conversion by both words and actions. Never condemning, but always because he wanted them to have a better life.

This is what Jesus's answer means for us, today. We must call others to conversion by our words and by our actions. But we also must continue to associate with those who have not yet converted from their sinful ways. We must be present in the lives of our family who are separated from the Church. At times we must speak words, but at other times we must simply be a good and holy presence in their lives.

The words of the Alleluia verse today are worth remembering: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." We cannot reconcile our brothers and sisters to God. That is not our job. God does that himself. We are the bearers of the *message* of reconciliation. We must make sure that the message is heard, but we must also trust that God be present in the hearts of our family, and will reconcile them to himself in *his* time.