

Twenty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year “A”

**“Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Toward the door we never opened
Into the rose garden.”**

These words, from the pen of T.S. Eliot point to the human reality of regret. Regret is that perennial bitter aftertaste otherwise known as “should have.” For example, “I should have gone to college.” “I should have visited my parents more in the nursing home.” “I should have taken better care of myself.”

One of the biggest sources of regret comes from words said, especially words of judgment, laced with venomous anger. And just as regrettable are those words never said, like: “I love you,” “I forgive you,” “I need you,” “I am sorry.”

The Word of God today is all about saying the proper words at the right time so as to build God’s kingdom and live a life without regret.

In the first reading from Ezekiel God makes Ezekiel a watchman for the House of Israel. Essentially, Ezekiel is to confront evil-doers and encourage them to do the right thing. God says, “If you warn the wicked, trying to turn him from his way, and he refuses to turn from his way, he shall die for his guilt, but you shall save yourself.” It is evident that Ezekiel bears a particular responsibility to speak up.

The Gospel meanwhile addresses this same issue on a personal level. For Jesus says, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.” In the face of personal hurt, Jesus calls for confrontation and correction with the necessary party.

In the second reading St. Paul underlines the spirit of such confrontation. It is all to be expressed in love. According to St. Paul, “Love does no evil to the neighbor.”

Sadly, as we live our lives one of the things that precludes us from speaking up is fear. So many of our greatest regrets ultimately go back to

a fear of one kind or another. Perhaps it is the fear of rejection and/or standing alone.

There is an ancient Arabian proverb that says, “If one person calls you a donkey, pay no attention to that person. But if five people call you one, go out and buy yourself a saddle.”

Obviously, there is something to be said about voices, and numbers. But Ezekiel had no such luxury in his role as a prophet. He was the one person, the one voice sent by God to speak up. And while his words were often met with resistance and ignorance, he spoke up nonetheless and probably had no regrets.

Right now in our individual lives we all no doubt have situations boiling on the stove, beckoning our voice. Perhaps it is a family member, a co-worker, or a friend. We do not like what we see because we know it’s wrong. Or maybe someone has hurt us and they keep hurting us. What are we going to do? Are we going to let the fear of confrontation, rejections, and deeper hurt take precedence over our love for that person? We need to speak up and say something, of course by using the right words at the right time.

The stakes are high! For if we do not say something, the person not only remains in the wicked way, but also we for our part will fall victim to that terrible human reality called “regret.”

Remember the words of T.S. Eliot:

**“Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Toward the door we never opened
Into the rose garden.”**

The unopened door was a beautiful rose garden. You know, so many of our unopened doors, unspoken words, lead to rose gardens, as well. The key is not to let fear win out over love.