

Rebuke
Twenty-third Sunday Year A
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Rebukes sting. They cut, leaving one raw and reeling. Our dignity and identity have been attacked. Our reality has been shattered. Yet, the comment corrects our misperceptions. Instead of living in a façade, the rebuke, properly formed, corrects confusions, foils fallacies, and rectifies wrongs. Instead of living in a fantasy, denying the reality of the consequences, the rebuke sets us straight.

Fraternal correction feels harsh; yet as scripture tells us, God rebukes those He loves. Judith the seer of Israel warning the people, praying for restoration writes, "The Lord scourges those who draw near to him, in order to admonish them" (Judith 8:27; see also Heb 12:6; Jer 46:28).

Admonishment astounds. We cannot fathom why our God would admonish us. Yet, God's ways are not ours. The rebuke we experience cuts, yet God acts out of love not malice. God expects much. To improve ourselves according to God's ways because "Nothing unclean shall enter it" (Rev 21:27), He rebukes us of any imperfection, small or great.

Intense yes because our ways drastically differ from his ways. Our natural desires seek comfort, leading to indifference, which is destructive. Focused on self, we self-aggrandize without ever testing or proving ourselves. We lessen our ideals, morals, and values. We seek expediency and easiness rather than excellence. Sacrifice and discipline are cast aside so comfort and consolation come. Yet anything of value comes at a price. Excellence costs and those who embrace the sacrifice and discipline—the rebukes and corrections—find fulfillment.

If never truly tested, we do not realize our true potential. Potentially, we are greater than the angels, more powerful than demons, and saintlier than we ever thought. Yet, mediocrity and inferiority plague our minds. Thinking we are a mistake or worse a disgrace, we reject correction, forgetting the proverb, "A fool despises his father's instruction, but he who heeds admonition is prudent" (Pro 15:5).

Love innately longs for divinity. We want union, a communion which transfigures and transcends us into something more than we ever thought we could be. We want sanctity, a participation in the divine. Divinized, we become elevated, enlightened, and empowered beyond our abilities because the Holy Spirit has no limits.

The Holy Spirit reigns in the unruly passions and urges. He chisels cutting away our imperfections, polishing us to perfection. Undeified, our hearts become noble, filled with gratitude and grace. Our identity has been transformed. We no longer live foolishly but live the reality of our divine dignity.

Seeking fulfillment apart from God and his discipline, vanity rather than truth rules. Power becomes our goal. As Lucifer tempted Adam and Eve to become self-determined: to define for themselves right and wrong, so do we become self-centered. This is the power of sin. It divinizes us apart from God. It makes us turn inward and divorces us from the true source of our dignity. God alone divinizes our dignity.

Seeing our imprudence, God intervenes, acting as Father, and disciplines our desires. He wants more from us, revealing our potential to become more like Him. Thus, when He sees us sinning, He corrects us. When he sees us floundering, He inspires. When He sees us despairing, He enters our

darkness, enlightening our path. Yet we, caught up, addicted and bewildered, fear the intervention. We shun his discipline, thinking we know better than God. Foolishly we follow our path and not his, even though our path led us into the darkness.

To bring us out of darkness, God sends messengers to penetrate the foolishness, exposing the deceptions that deceive our minds. We, as Isaiah explains, distort evil calling it good.

Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right! (Is 5:22–23).

Society inverts right and wrong. What is murder, we call life. What is perverted, we call personal expression. What is mutilation, we call physiotherapy. What is dehumanization, we call social advancement. We twist reality to satisfy our passions. We pervert reality becoming hard at heart. Afraid to expose the other, we stay silent. Afraid to be rejected because we rebuked the wickedness of our brother or sister, we, as Ezekiel warns, are guilty of their sin too.

Jesus, expanding upon Ezekiel's warning, empowers his apostles to correct each other. They too hold each other accountable and responsible, so sin does not fester but is corrected immediately. First, privately address the fault, no matter how small or grave. Then warn them with witnesses if they reject the rebuke. If they still live in their sin, take it to the Church and make it public.

Within Christianity, rebuking our brother or sister challenges the most devout. Exposing the fallacious thinking and rationalizations, frightens not just Christians, but even those of the hierarchy. Yet, in fidelity to the faith, each of us must face this fear, lest we fail to be faithful.

Rebuking another never condemns, but carefully and charitably calls them back to communion and fidelity to the Church's Tradition. Authentic Christianity holds dear holiness, for nothing unholy enters heaven. When Christians see an unholy act, what is offensive to the faith and morals, we hold the other accountable and responsible, charitably.

As recent history has shown, many, especially in the hierarchy, have failed grievously this command. The cost and the loss is the soul of Christianity. As in Ezekiel's day, so too in our day, the Holy Spirit left (Ez 10:4:-22). Instead of pure hearts, the hearts of many Christians became hardened and worse, shattered. Evil abounded but as St. Paul reminds us, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom 5:20).

More than ever, fraternal correction is needed. Firmly, we faithfully rebuke the wrongs of another, not out of anger, but love. We want to free our brother or sister from their fallacy, offering reconciliation. As the Psalmist says, "Harden not your hearts" (Ps 95:8). Divine rebukes cut, stripping away the layers that insulate our deceptions. This chastening softens the hardness of hearts, so all may convert and live.