

Fr. Romeo Evangelista Homily
Sunday, September 10, 2023
Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle A

Once upon a time, two brothers who lived on adjoining farms fell into conflict and their relationship was severed. It began with a small misunderstanding or petty quarrel and grew into a major difference. Finally, it exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence. One day, the older brother commissioned a carpenter to build an eight-foot-high fence between his farm and his brother's – as a counter-action to the large canal his brother had dug between them. He told the carpenter that he wanted a high fence that he may never see his brother again. He instructed him to use the pile of old lumber in his yard, and gave him the nails and the tools.

The older brother had an out-of-town business and was away for a week. When he returned, he was shocked to see not a fence but a bridge between his farm and his brother's was built by the carpenter. "I admire your guts to go against my order," was all he could say. Then he saw his younger brother crossing the bridge. They met in the middle. And without saying a word, they embraced one another. They asked the carpenter to stay with them a few days. "I'd love to," the carpenter said, "but I have many more bridges to build."

Are you building fences or bridges? When we come to the end of our days, just remember this –allow me to paraphrase a reflection I have read:

God will not ask what kind of car we drove; he will ask how many people we helped get where they needed to go.

God will not ask how big our house was; he will ask how many people we welcomed into our home.

God will not ask what neighborhood (or executive village) we lived in; he will ask how we treated our neighbors.

God will not ask how many fences we made; he will ask how many bridges we built.

Sad to say, many of us are preoccupied with having material things and with gaining social status and privilege, rather than with establishing and maintaining meaningful and healthy human relationships, and with mending and restoring broken relationships through Christian dialogue and reconciliation. We seem to be working more to build fences that separate or set us apart from one another. However, the Lord wants us to build a bridge between us and a brother or a sister we are in conflict with. Today's gospel reading is a practical instruction on how to build such a bridge.

It is the bridge of getting out of our way, the bridge of reaching out to the offender, the bridge of patience, mercy and humility, the bridge of having a meaningful dialogue, the bridge of forgiveness and reconciliation.

In other words, the Lord is exhorting us to reach out to an erring brother or sister, to take the initiative or the first step in the process of reconciliation. We must do fraternal correction – about which Jesus teaches in today's gospel passage – in the spirit of humility and charity, knowing that we are responsible for one another.

St. Paul reminds us in today's second reading: "Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another." Our fraternal (sisterly) correction must be motivated by one thing and one thing alone: LOVE. A Christian who is genuinely concerned about the good of a sister or brother is not ashamed or afraid and does not hesitate to correct an erring sister or brother.

Repeating the words of St. Paul in today's second reading: "Love does no evil to the neighbor." We are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Our love for our neighbor must be a forgiving, healing and reconciling love.

However, we must keep in mind what somebody said about this matter:

"People will not care what you know until they know that you care."

This is absolutely true in the context of fraternal (sisterly) correction. In admonishing and correcting a brother or a sister, we should really try first to make him or her feel our genuine care and concern – nothing less.

Whatever we do or say to a brother or sister who sins should be motivated by love, and by love alone.