

Cycle A – Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Sept. 6,, 2026

“Whatever you bind on earth ...”

OPENING PRAYER (Psalm 95)

Leader: O come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock
of our salvation.

**All: Let us come into God’s presence with thanksgiving;
let us make joyful noise with songs of praise.**

Leader: O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker.

**All: For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture.
Amen.**

First Reading – Ezekiel 33:7-9

Using the image of a sentinel, whose task it was to keep watch and sound the alarm at impending danger, Ezekiel warns the people and calls them to turn from their wicked ways. Ezekiel’s words bear the message of God’s cry of love, urging the people to turn away from complacency and change their hearts. Ezekiel’s job is not to force the people’s response, but to make sure they are aware of both the danger of their ways and the options available to avert this danger.

1. What kind of warnings does our modern society need in both public and private morality?
2. Have you ever had to speak “a hard word” as a warning to another person? Do you know someone who did, either to you or to someone else? What was that like?

Second Reading – Romans 13:8-10

Paul summarizes the elaborate Jewish legal code by pointing to the law’s underlying motive: **love your neighbor**. Since Paul’s letters pre-date the writing of the Gospels, his words are first in giving us a theology of love in relation to the law. The law merely functions as a custodian until our hearts and actions are moved by love. St. Augustine is quoted as saying: “Love, and do what you will.”

1. How can you tell the difference between human interactions motivated by love and actions motivated by the law?
2. What do you think is the prevailing climate in the life of your parish: love or “the law,” i.e. “the rules?”
3. How does one foster a community where law and love can exist to harmony to one another?

Gospel Reading – Matthew 18:15-20

Matthew gives a concrete illustration of Ezekiel's role as a sentinel and Paul's call to love our neighbor. Sharing Ezekiel's hope for reconciliation and a change of heart, Matthew lays out a process to use when division and disagreement jeopardize the unity of the faith community. The deep commitment to always reaching out in love is paramount, taking precedence over a desire to condemn and cast out. Such structures of accountability are grounded in love and serve to strengthen the community and heal any ruptures which may occur.

1. Jesus demonstrates her what it means to admonish someone, is this a successful way to point out the fault of a sister or brother in Christ out of love for them?
2. How have you seen Matthew's approach to resolving disagreements in action?
3. How do we "bind and loose" one another in daily relationships?
4. Have you ever had to advise someone to change an unhealthy practice using this method that St. Matthew imprints for us? If so what was the result and would you attempt similar interventions in future circumstances.

LIVING THE WORD

God's challenge – Make an effort to have a conversation with someone who holds very different views from your own regarding faith. Reflect and share the experience with your small group.

PRAYING THE WORD

Intercession: For those afraid or in denial of the truth, for those whose views and life choices cause divisions with their loved ones, and for all who work for peace and reconciliation in the world. We pray to the Lord.

(Invite personal intentions, ending with "Our Father...")

Concluding Prayer:

*Leader: Holy God, out of love for us
you warn us and caution us about
destructive choices and wrong living.*

**All: Open our heart so we may hear
your admonishments with love.**

*Leader: Fill us with this your love especially
in our attempts to resolve differences and disagreements.*

**All: Help us to use the power of binding and loosing wisely
according to your divine will, not ours. Amen.**

Leader: Let us share with one another a sign of Christ's peace.