

Continuing His Sermon on the Plain, which began two weeks ago in our Sunday Gospel, our Lord Jesus speaks powerfully today on the nature of discipleship. For the sake of our reflection, I'd like to focus on the first half of Christ's teaching today and so His words bear repeating: "Why do you notice the *splinter* in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the *wooden beam in your own*? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove that *splinter in your eye*,' when you do not even notice the *wooden beam in your own eye*? *You hypocrite!* Remove the *wooden beam* from your eye *first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye.*"

So our Lord Jesus is really challenging us today—and whenever our Lord challenges us, it's always because He loves us. First, notice the size difference between a "splinter" and a "wooden beam." A splinter is obviously much smaller than a wooden beam, so what Jesus is saying here is that it's foolish and wrong for us to criticize and correct others for minor and small faults when we ourselves are beset with much greater and more serious faults. In other words, how can we help and correct others with *their* faults, especially their smaller faults, when we

don't even acknowledge *the larger and more serious faults* in *our own lives*? As disciples of Christ and *as imperfect sinners*, we must acknowledge and correct our *own sinfulness first* before we acknowledge and lovingly correct the sinfulness of others.

Lastly, notice that Jesus *never* says, "don't remove the splinter from your brother's eye!" No He says, "Remove the wooden beam from *your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye.*" So Christ *does want us* to love our neighbor by trying to help them to do good and avoid evil. Christ *does want us* to love our neighbor by challenging them to change and to do better when it comes to virtue. Christ does want us love our neighbor by evangelizing them and inviting them to repentance and new life in Him!

Whether it's the person with the "wooden beam in their eye" or the person with the "splinter in their eye," what our Lord Jesus Christ is calling for here is what His Church teaches as one of the Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy known as "Admonishing the sinner." Now what does the word, "admonish" mean? Well it may be defined as "correcting" the sinner or "warning, reprimanding, urging, or advising" the sinner in a

firm manner. Now this important spiritual work of mercy needs to be explained and clarified so that we don't misunderstand it in any way.

First and foremost, admonishing the sinner is not some evil act of harsh judgment and condemnation. Rather admonishing the sinner is an act of *love for the sinner*. It's meant to be a form of "charitable feedback." This is why admonishing the sinner is a *spiritual work of mercy and not an evil act of judgment*. Admonishing the sinner does *not mean judging and condemning the sinner*, but rather it means *loving the sinner by correcting their sinful behavior* and challenging and helping them to change and embrace virtue! Admonishing the sinner is about inviting the sinner on behalf of Christ our Savior to a new life of freedom, holiness, and happiness.

Loving someone does not mean supporting or condoning their sinfulness. Rather truly loving someone means seeking the authentic good of another purely for the sake of the other—seeking *the holiness and salvation* of another—seeking the *authentic* happiness and freedom of another! If someone is stuck and dying in a destructive pit of sin, the loving thing to do is to help them get out! If someone is drowning in

their own sinfulness, the loving and compassionate thing to do is to help get them out and lead them to Christ, Who loves them more than they know! Now sadly, there are many who are perfectly fine with living in a destructive pit of sin and so in that case, all we can do is the best we can do with the help of God's grace, love them, pray for them, and continue to reach out to them with kindness and compassion, but if they reject our efforts, that's on them and there's nothing we can do about that.

Secondly, admonishing the sinner is a perfect example of *loving the sinner and hating the sin*—or put another way, loving the person and rejecting the sin. As our merciful Savior has clearly taught us, we are *not* to condemn the *person*, but *only the sin*. Moreover, since admonishing the sinner is one of the seven Spiritual Works of Mercy, *it must be motivated by love and compassion*. Admonishing the sinner *must not in any way* be motivated by pride, an arrogant sense of self-righteousness, or a selfish and narcissistic air of condescension. Rather any correction of the sinner must be done with respect, compassion, gentleness, and prudence—always keeping the dignity and desired holiness of the person front and center.

Admonishing the sinner is a much-needed work of mercy in our society, which is tragically fraught with so much moral confusion. Moral relativism has undoubtedly been poisoning our culture, brainwashing people to think that there's absolutely no such thing as right and wrong, good and evil, truth and falsehood. Moral relativism irrationally claims that there's no objective standard of good and evil, but rather that everything is relative to the individual and all that matters is what *you subjectively* think and feel. "You have your truth and I have my truth"—"what you consider to be good, another person might consider to be evil" and vice-versa. This is insanity—and a society cannot survive and thrive with such defective moral and philosophical thinking that is not rooted in objective truth and reality.

Lastly and most obviously, *we are all sinners* in need of being admonished! *We are all sinners* in need of being challenged and held accountable for our sins by Christ and His Church. Brothers and sisters, whether we like it or not, *we all need to be held accountable* as disciples of Christ. We all need to be lovingly challenged to be the best version of ourselves. I hope and pray that each of us has at least one person in

our life, whether it's a priest or someone in our family or among our friends and co-workers, who is not afraid to challenge us and hold us accountable in our primary vocation to holiness.

We all need feedback in our lives, *most especially* charitable feedback that helps us to grow in faith, hope, love, and holiness—all for the sake of our eternal salvation and happiness in Christ. Brothers and sisters, the truth of the matter is that as imperfect and wounded sinners, we all need to humbly swallow our pride, tuck away our ego, and accept loving admonition from others so that we can truly be the best version of ourselves and the saints that Christ is calling us to be!

This is why Christ gives us the family of the Church. We're not alone in our desire for and pursuit of holiness, happiness, and salvation. We're not alone in our life's journey as disciples of Christ. We're all in this together as one family and so we have to help each other, support each other, encourage each other, and yes lovingly challenge each other to be the best that we can be with the help of God's grace!

So as we worship and receive our merciful Savior in the Most Holy Eucharist, let us ask Him for the grace to be humble and courageous in

identifying and rooting out our own sinfulness so that we can lovingly help others to do the same and be open to the charitable feedback of others. Then and only then will we have the heart of a faithful disciple who is able to bear good fruit.