

A reading from the book of the prophet Ezekiel.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Thus says the Lord:

“So you, O son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel;
whenever you hear a word from my mouth,
you shall give them warning from me.

“If I say to the wicked,
‘O wicked one, you shall surely die,’
and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from their ways,
the wicked person shall die in their iniquity,
but their blood I will require at your hand.

But if you warn the wicked to turn from their ways,
and they do not turn from their ways,
the wicked shall die in their iniquity,
but you will have saved your life.”

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Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:
Owe no one anything, except to love one another;
for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.
The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery;
You shall not murder;
You shall not steal;
You shall not covet”;
and any other commandment,
are summed up in this word,
“Love your neighbour as yourself.”
Love does no wrong to a neighbour;
therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – A 23

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord

Jesus spoke to his disciples,
“If your brother or sister sins against you,
go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone.
If he or she listens to you,
you have regained your brother or sister.
But if the person does not,
take one or two others along with you,
so that every word may be confirmed
by the evidence of two or three witnesses.
If the person refuses to listen to them,
tell it to the Church;
and if that person refuses to listen even to the Church,
let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Truly I tell you,
whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,
and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.
Again, truly I tell you,
if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask,
it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.
For where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Ezekiel 33:7-9

This passage comes from a chapter in which Ezekiel sets down the responsibilities of the prophet as he envisages them after the restoration from exile.

One of the images under which he defines that role is that of the watchman, a familiar figure in the defence system of Palestine. Watchmen were posted on the hills to warn of the approach of a foreign invader.

Ez 33:1-6 are a parable; verses 7-9 (today's reading) are its application to the prophetic role. It is characteristic of Ezekiel that he conceives the prophet's function as concerned with individuals.

This was a result of the destruction of the nation as a corporate entity at the time of the exile. Henceforth all that the prophet can do is to speak to the individual.

If the prophet fails to deliver the warning, it is his own responsibility. If he does deliver it and the individual refuses to pay heed, it is not the prophet's fault. He has discharged his responsibility.

Ezekiel's picture of the prophet as watchman has been selected to go with the Gospel, which speaks of mutual concern in the eschatological community, in which we all share the gift of the Spirit.

Responsorial Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

The Venite consists of two parts: the first a call to worship, the second a warning against neglect of the word of God.

The first part is very popular among Anglicans as the invitatory canticle of Morning Prayer, but in most recent revisions the stern warnings of the second part have frequently been omitted.

Yet, it was this second part that the author of Hebrews (Heb 3:7-4:13) took up and expounded as especially relevant to his Church.

The situation of the people of this Church was that they were growing stale instead of advancing in the Christian life (the medieval sin of *acedia*), just as Israel grew tired in the wilderness.

The refrain, "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts," is singularly apt after Ezekiel's parable of the watchman.

Reading II: Romans 13:8-10

As we saw last Sunday, chapters 13-15 of Romans consist largely of ethical exhortation. Here Paul presents the second table of the Decalogue.

Note the unusual order (Hellenistic-Jewish): 7, 6, 8, 10, according to the Reformed and Anglican enumeration; 6, 5, 7, 9-10, according to the Roman and Lutheran enumeration. Paul then summarizes (Rm 13:9) its single injunctions in the all-embracing command of Leviticus 19:18: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Note the logical structure of this passage:

1. An imperative (Rm 13:8a).
2. The grounds for the imperative (Rm 13:8b).
3. The second table (Rm 13:9).
4. A deduction from the imperative given in verse 8 (Rm 13:10).

Evidently Paul is drawing upon an established pattern of catechesis. This pattern was probably derived from Hellenistic Judaism, as is shown not only by the order of the commandments but also by the typically Hellenistic attempt to discover a single unifying principle behind the separate injunctions.

The teaching of this passage is that there is really only one commandment that is universal and covers every situation and to which we are always obligated—the commandment of love. The separate commandments of the Decalogue are to be seen as specifications or illustrations of what love may mean in particular situations.

Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20

This Gospel reading is closely connected to last week’s. These are the only passages in all four Gospels in which the term “church” (ekklesia) occurs. Both passages include the promise about binding and loosing; in Mt 16 it is addressed to Peter only, and in Matthew 18 to the disciples generally.

It would seem reasonable to suppose that Matthew has taken both passages from a common source that formed a commentary on church origins: (1) a community rule (Mt 18:15-17), paralleled at Qumran; (2) the promise about binding and loosing, which in our opinion comes from a resurrection story, as is indicated by its combination with the *Tu es Petrus* saying in Matthew 16 and by the parallel tradition in John 20:19-23.

In its original form this tradition was evidently a saying of the risen Lord empowering the Twelve to admit or exclude men and women from the kingdom according to whether they accepted or rejected the kerygma.

By combining it with the saying about fraternal correction, Matthew’s source has converted it into a church rule. Binding and loosing now become the function of the whole community, and their character is changed to the administration of discipline within the community.

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