

Our Brother and Sister Keepers

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We have heard many times, “humans are social animals.” COVID-19 has exposed our social nature, making it very difficult keep down our socialization until the scourge of the pandemic passes. The various demonstrations and rebellions against government authority directive to keep social distancing also shows human selfishness, disregarding the welfare of their fellow citizen. We have witnessed the demise of many individuals who disregarded such directives and affecting their family members, friends, and fellow citizens in the aftermath. It also affirms the free will of human person, “There are set before you fire and water; to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand. Before man are life and death, whichever he chooses shall be given him” (Sirach 15: 16-17). This refers to the individual person’s choice.

The ultimate choice between right and wrong is up to the individual person but it clearly makes us responsible to guide our brothers and sisters to do the right choice. The first reading tells us, “When you hear me say anything, you shall warn them for me... if you warn the wicked, trying to turn him from his way, and he refuses to turn from his way, he shall die for his guilt, but you shall save yourself” (Ezekiel 33: 7-9). Such intervention should come should be rooted in love as St. Paul in the second reading affirms, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:8-10). God does not give us the liberty to choose our neighbor, rather every human person whether he/she lives next door across town or state line deserves our love.

In the Gospel reading in line with the first reading from Prophet Ezekiel, Jesus says, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother.” Jesus also give more opportunity for the transgressor to repent in front of witnesses and the congregation. In our current context call for racial and social justice, it is not only individuals who are called to mend their wicked ways, our nation, our systems and even our church are called to repent from racist ways. It is our Christian duty to “comfort the oppressed not to lose hope and admonish the oppressor lest die in his/her arrogance.” Jesus in the Gospel spells out the role and responsibility of the Church with the power to bind and loosen as well as to bring people together in the name of Christ as brothers and sisters.

The Church has called racism a sin but as whole, the Church is timid to call the racist to turn from his/her wicked ways. The Church as institution will be accountable for its failure to call the racist to return from his/her wicked ways, disgracing the divine image in each human person, both the offender and the victim. The agony of many Black Catholics is that the Church has not been forceful, expressing its prophetic voice for individuals, communities, and systems to mend their ways. The Church has the duty to shake up from its pulpits those comfortable with racist behavior or live a life of privilege, benefiting from social inequities and discrimination. None of us can escape the responsibility of being “our brother and sister keepers.”