



The Lector

Ministry

Proclaiming the Word

at

St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church

**Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sunday, September 6th**

**Ezekiel 33:7-9
Romans 13:8-10**

Reflection on Lectoring

Genuine sharing happens when it is accompanied by love. The same is true when a lector shares the Scriptures.

In his book, *Love Alone is Credible*, theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar states it plainly: "Love exists only between persons." It is not an abstract concept. Rather, it is something that must be shared to be real.

Recently, at our weekend Masses, that sharing of love was celebrated. Everyone going through our church doors was told, "You belong here." With smiles, name tags, and an invitation to greet each other they were told they were "welcome". They were told they were loved. They were told they were needed.

St John's Gospel says it very directly: "This is how all will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another" (13:35).

Helping to create a loving community of disciples offers an opportunity at Mass for every lector. It starts with asking: "Do I have a role in sharing God's love with others – with the people with whom I worship?"

Perhaps, a more direct question is: "Do I genuinely love the people with whom I am sharing the Scriptures?"

God did not inspire the Scriptures just to tell a story. He gave us the Scriptures to tell us he loves us. As lectors we must cherish that love and pass it on.

First Reading

Forgiveness or Punishment?

Among the not-so-simple questions addressed by Scripture is the question of justice or mercy, punishment or forgiveness. Is a proportional “eye for an eye” what Scripture recommends? Or is Jesus’ command to forgive one’s brother “seventy times seven” closer to the mark? Do Scripture passages about justice and mercy present an uncomfortable contradiction that we wish would just go away? Or is there a value in the kind of uncertainty that leads to further discussion, even when clear answers are not readily available?

All three of today’s readings can take us deeper into the question of justice and mercy. What do you do when someone does bad things? What options are available when that person refuses to listen? Is there a duty to punish or a duty to forgive?

At the very least, today’s first reading from Ezekiel suggests that there is a duty to warn. In his book, *Religion and Philosophy*, English philosopher and historian, R.G. Collingwood relates some of the varied approaches people have had to the issue of justice. He also suggests that God may have the best solution: “God’s attitude towards the sins of men must be one which combines condemnation of the sinful will with love and hope” (p.180).

Are mercy and justice mutually exclusive? Perhaps, at best, today’s first reading tells us that we have a mutual responsibility for each other.

Second Reading

Grievance Upon Grievance

In Chapter 13 of Romans, Paul advises his readers regarding their obligations to civil authority and to the divine law in the commandments. He makes it clear that violations of either one will subject the violator to negative consequences.

Paul also offers a way beyond the simple, legal formula of crime and punishment: “Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”

The news today is filled with stories about someone or some group seeking retribution for the actions of others. Grievances piled upon grievances.

There may be no quick answers or easy solutions. Perhaps, however, one suggestion is to proclaim with hope the last verse of today’s second reading: “Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.”