



SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 4–10

TIME AFTER PENTECOST — LECTIONARY 23

FIRST READING: Ezekiel 33:7-11

A reading from Ezekiel.

⁷So you, mortal, I have made a sentinel for the house of Israel;
whenever you hear a word from my mouth,
you shall give them warning from me.

⁸If I say to the wicked, “O wicked ones, you shall surely die,”
and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from their ways,
the wicked shall die in their iniquity,
but their blood I will require at your hand.

⁹But 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.

¹⁰Now you, mortal, say to the house of Israel:
Thus you have said:

“Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us,
and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?”

¹¹Say to them: As I live, says the Lord GOD,
I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked
but that the wicked turn from their ways and live;
turn back, turn back from your evil ways,
for why will you die, O house of Israel?

Word of God, word of life. or The word of the Lord.

PSALMODY: Psalm 119:33-40

FIRST READING *Ezekiel = eh-ZEE-kee-el*

God is speaking to the prophet Ezekiel—the Immortal to the mortal. The prophet is the early warning device for the people (the “sentinel for the house of Israel”). His charge is to declare both the judgment of God and the grace of God to God’s people so that they might be moved to repentance. Verse 10 is a bit tricky. Introduced by the words “Thus you have said,” God prepares the prophet to address the despair that the contrite may feel (“we waste away because of [our sins]”). The prophet’s reply, the announcement of the grace of God, is the substance of verse 11. Take care to help the people distinguish between God’s address to the prophet and the prophet’s relaying of God’s word to the people.

SECOND READING: Romans 13:8-14

A reading from Romans.

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love one another,
for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

⁹The 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,
“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor;
therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

¹¹Besides this, you know what time it is,
how it is already the moment for you to wake from sleep.
For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers;

¹²the night is far gone; the day is near.

Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light;

¹³let us walk decently as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness,
not in illicit sex and licentiousness,
not in quarreling and jealousy.

¹⁴Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ,
and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Word of God, word of life. or The word of the Lord.

SECOND READING *licentiousness = ly-SEN-chus-ness*

This reading is a straightforward reminder that if one genuinely loves the neighbor, one will do no wrong toward the neighbor. That reminder is followed by an appeal to “put on the armor of light; . . . put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is an encouraging word designed to wake up and motivate the complacent. Give it that kind of energy!

GOSPEL: Matthew 18:15-20

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

「Jesus said to the disciples:」

¹⁵“If your brother or sister sins against you,
go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone.
If you are listened to, you have regained that one.

¹⁶But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you,
so that every word may be confirmed
by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

¹⁷If that person refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church,
and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church,
let such a one be to you as a gentile and a tax collector.

¹⁸Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,
and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

¹⁹Again, 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.

²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them.”

The gospel of the Lord.

GOSPEL

Our Lord’s ardent instruction to the Twelve relates to lovingly holding the community together, rather than establishing a minimal standard for excommunication. It requires a reconciling tone on the part of the gospel reader. Verse 18 might be more effectively connected to verses 15-17, while verse 19 might be helpfully attached to verse 20.