

# Our Sunday Readings

## Guarding God's People

EZEKIEL 33:7-9  
PSALM 95:1-2,6-9  
ROMANS 13:8-10  
MATTHEW 18:15-20

### **EZEKIEL 33:7-9**

#### **Reading closely**

1. How does God address Ezekiel?
2. What exactly does God want this prophet to do?
3. How might God have held Ezekiel responsible for not warning people?
4. How might Ezekiel have tried warning people?
5. What might Ezekiel have felt when *the wicked* ignored his warning?
6. How do you think Ezekiel's life changed after God gave him this role?

#### **Living the word**

7. Have you ever been an Ezekiel to someone?
8. Has someone ever been an Ezekiel to you?
9. What have you or what would you find most challenging about being a watchman?

*Love does no evil to the neighbor;  
hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.*

—Romans 13:10

### **THE FIRST READING**

#### **Enemies without**

Ancient cities had watchmen who would blow a trumpet if they saw an enemy approaching. If people ignored the warning, the city might be conquered, but this wasn't the watchman's fault. If a watchman failed to warn people of danger, however, the blame was his.

#### **Enemies within**

As watchman, Ezekiel isn't to look for enemies coming from outside Israel but from within it. When Israel hears the prophet's warning, the nation should prepare to battle not its enemies but its own sin.

The penalty Ezekiel faces if he fails to warn God's people is as severe as the penalty the people face: death. The penalty might reinforce the idea of a harsh Old Testament God, but God calls Ezekiel to be a watchman so that people will turn away from sin and be saved.

**MATTHEW 18:15-20**

**Reading closely**

1. What would count as a serious sin that should be addressed?
2. What effect might serious sin have on a Christian community?
3. What would make this process effective?
4. What could make this process ineffective?
5. How might a whole community help a serious sinner?
6. What might *treat him as you would a Gentile or tax collector* look like?
7. What do you think are the differences between the authority given to Peter (16:18-19) and the authority given here to the church?
8. What does this passage reveal about the early church?

**Living the word**

9. Have you ever seen this procedure used? What was the outcome?
10. Would you follow this procedure if you saw the need? Why/Why not?

**THE GOSPEL READING**

**Clear guidelines**

In book four of Matthew’s Gospel Jesus tackles the problem of sin within the Christian community. In this passage he outlines a procedure for dealing with individual Christians who are committing a serious sin. The procedure comes from Judaism.

- Step 1: Talk with the sinner privately
- Step 2: Talk with the sinner in the presence of 1-2 other people who can back you up and confirm that the sinner refuses to change
- Step 3: Bring the matter to the attention of the whole community. If the sinner still refuses to repent, exclude the person.

Serious sin makes the whole community look bad and can lead others to sin. This three-step procedure protects the community and gives the sinner every possible chance to change.

**Avoiding hypocrisy**

Those who talk with the sinner must do so prayerfully and with love. Jesus takes a harsh stance against hypocrisy (Mt 23). He also warns us to vigorously root out sin from our own lives (18:6-9).

**Like a Gentile or tax collector**

Jews tried to keep apart from *Gentiles* (non-Jews) and *tax collectors*, who raised money for Rome, their foreign conqueror. Because Jesus reached out to people who felt unloved and excluded, he’s not saying here that he wants sinners to be ignored or treated unkindly.

**Jesus shares his authority**

In Jewish tradition it was said that when two devout Jews gathered to reflect on God’s law, God was with them. Jesus adapts this familiar saying to assure his church that when they follow the proper procedures humbly and prayerfully, he will be in their midst, upholding their decision.

**Excommunication**

Mt 18:15-20 provides a basis for excommunication, the penalty in canon law (the Catholic Church’s legal system) for serious sins like renouncing one’s faith. If excommunicated, a person isn’t allowed to participate in aspects of church life like the Eucharist. The penalty of excommunication can be lifted through the Sacrament of Penance and, in more public cases, through a formal statement.

**PRAYER**

Lord Jesus,  
 today let us hear your voice;  
 harden not our hearts.  
 When we sin, help us to admit it.  
 When we persist in sin,  
 give us the strength and wisdom to ask for help.  
 When someone points out our sin,  
 humble us to receive correction.  
 When we must point out someone else’s sin,  
 make us speak with gentleness and love.  
 Today let us hear your voice;  
 harden not our hearts.  
 We ask this in your holy name. Amen.