

Ezekiel 33:7-9

Romans 13:8-10

Matthew 18:15-20

I welcome you all with joy and love to this Eucharistic celebration.

My dear brothers and sisters, this Sunday I am very excited about the second reading, from St. Paul to the Romans. He gives us one basic message that sums up the whole Christian life:

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the Law."

Then one may ask me, "Father Francis, who is my neighbor?"

The answer is simple: Look around yourself. Look in your heart. Look at your environment. You will see your neighbor.

Your neighbor is your:

Family – husband, wife and children.

Your relatives.

The people in your neighborhood.

The people at your workplace.

The people you meet in church.

The people you meet in the stores – Kroger and Meijer – my favorite so far.

The people you meet in restaurants.

The people you work with.

The people you meet along the way.

The people you meet in school as students.

And every other person you meet in life.

Therefore, above all other virtues, **we must show love to other people in our lives, because we are sons and daughters of the Most Loving Father.**

Now, perfect love is tested when there is a conflict. That is why the Gospel today from Matthew is so practical for us.

Jesus gives us three clear steps for fraternal correction.

Step one: If your brother or sister sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between the two of you alone. Just the two of you. No gossip. No text message to everybody else.

Step two: If he does not listen, take one or two witnesses. Sit at the round table and talk.

Step three: If we do that, the conflict will be resolved, peace will be restored, and we will all rejoice at the end. That is love in action.

I remember back in my seminary days, two seminarians, my own classmates, had a simple conflict. Each felt annoyed by the other, yet they had been very good friends. And of course, both were my friends. One of them approached me about the situation, and I said, "Okay, let us harmonize with each other."

I called them to a quiet place. We first prayed. Then I made them face each other and I openly asked them: let each of you openly talk about the conflict.

They opened up. They listened. And we all left that place smiling and laughing. And as I speak to you now, we are all like biological brothers, and all of us are priests today, serving the Lord with joy. Why? Because we put love first.

So my dear friends, my challenge for us this week: In all our actions, let us put God first. Put on love. And we will win our neighbor back to God and back to ourselves, even when there is a conflict.

I wish you a happy Labor Day on Monday. Use it not only to rest, but as a moment to forgive and to love one another, and to celebrate joyfully.

May Mother Mary and St. Bavo pray for us. Amen.