

**Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis**  
**Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Sept. 5-6, 2020, Cycle A**

I am sure we are all familiar with the sculpture of three monkeys sitting together: one covering his eyes, one his mouth, and the third covering his ears. The monkeys depict the ancient Confucian teaching: "See no evil, speak no evil, and hear no evil." See no evil, speak no evil, and hear no evil is not the kind of life that Jesus and the Prophet Ezekiel are calling us to. As believers we are not to close our eyes and our ears to the evil that surrounds us. While we certainly are not to speak evil, we are to call out the evil people are perpetuating around us. Both Jesus and the prophet Ezekiel call us not to be silent.

The prophet Ezekiel had been called forth by God to be a watchman over the house of Israel. Ezekiel wasn't called to be a sentry, warning of evil coming from outside marauders. No, warning of evil coming from without would have been too easy. Ezekiel's much more arduous mission was to protect his people from the evil they were committing; the thankless task of saving people from themselves. Ezekiel feels himself compelled to denounce the corruption, and the injustice the Israelites were living, because he was painfully aware that silence equals complicity. God says to Ezekiel: "If... you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way... I will hold you responsible for his death."

Ezekiel though is not a Prophet of doom and gloom; he is a prophet of hope, calling on people to live lives of justice and love for a better world. Prophets recognize evil for what evil is: a toxic degradation of all that is good, holy and true. The prophet names evil in order to reveal the good alternative.

In today's Gospel, Jesus outlines his methodology for dealing with community members who perpetuate evil. He proposes a four-step, incremental approach to call members of the community to amend their ways, beginning with a one on one conversation about the issue. Additional witnesses are called in if necessary, and then going to a synod, or formal gathering of the Christian community. If even the third step fails to bring the person around, the community must take a public stand and declare that the person refuses to be in communion of mind and heart with them.

Jesus designed this pedagogy to bring people back to community. Jesus is teaching us that when someone is doing us wrong our responsibility is to try to win that person over. Put in starkly simple terms. Jesus says, "When someone offends you do everything in your power to help him or her." In Jesus' approach, our focus belongs on the person, not the offense. He wants us to be concerned that a choice for evil is ultimately as detrimental to the evildoer as it is hurtful to the community. He teaches that we are responsible to try to save the sinner.

This week, Christians throughout the world begin our annual celebration of the Season of Creation (Sept. 1 – Oct. 4). This year, unlike ever before we are confronting the interrelated challenges of environmental crises, institutionalized racism and the COVID-19 pandemic. Pope Francis suggests that the Spirit may be working uniquely through the trifecta. The addition of COVID-19 to the crises of Earth and relationships has proven that everyone on Earth is intimately connected. This leads us to understand these three crises as intertwined pandemics that threaten us all and endanger our common future.

Like the exile for Israel, COVID-19 combined with climate change and our growing awareness of systemic racism may be a blessing in disguise offering us a graced perhaps last chance to change the course of our history. The evil is facing us are global rather than personal. Our response must be tailored to the need. Whether we start by addressing health, racism, or climate, the others will come along in the wake.

It is time to open our eyes and ears so that we can assume our responsibility and speak in the name of God on behalf of creation and the people of the Earth. Ezekiel reminds us of our responsibility and Jesus has promised to be with us in the process. The moment has come to remember that we are Christians, people baptized to be prophets not blind, deaf, and silent sculpted monkeys.