

September 10, 2017 The Watchman Homily: Brothers and sisters, In the course of my long life, I have viewed countless television dramas and mysteries. It is worth my noting that in many episodes one of the minor characters is the night watchman. Seldom is he depicted in a favorable light. Generally, he is depicted as a buffoon, an incompetent employee. While on duty, he could be sleeping, eating, away from his post, watching a sporting event on television or even working hand in hand with criminals whose intent is to compromise the security of the place where the night watchman works. Often I asked myself the question of why would a supervisor ever leave the care of the company's treasures or the security of his plant to a man who is obviously negligent? The risk is much too great!

In biblical times, the "watchman" served a key role as the sentry of Israel. He had a sacred duty to be on the alert and to give warning of an enemy's approach. If he had the enemy in his sights, he would then sound his trumpet. If he failed in his duties, many lives would eventually be lost. Negligence is inexcusable. Even in our modern times, it is not unusual to see watchers on the hills of Israel standing guard. But of even greater concern for the "watchman" is the hidden enemy, the enemy within the borders of Israel. The watchman must denounce sin in the ranks of Israel. As custodian of the Word of God, he must warn the wicked of their impending fate if they persist in their evil ways.

The prophet Ezekiel was appointed watchman for the house of Israel. In the first reading we hear the God of Israel say, "When you hear me say anything, you shall warn them for me". (Ez.33:7) The prophet's task is difficult. He must dissuade the wicked person to turn from his evil way, In fulfilling the Lord's command, he runs the risk of losing his popularity and is more than likely to incur the wrath of his people, who do not accept criticism kindly. In his reflections on the role of the prophet, the noted author Peter Kreeft writes, "Like every true prophet of God, Ezekiel said two things, the bad news and the good news, sin and salvation. Whenever you hear half of this message without the other, you know the messenger is not a true prophet".

Some of you may be of an age to recall when the Spiritual Works of Mercy were taught in our religion classes. Allow me to list the first three of them: correct the sinner, instruct the ignorant and counsel the doubting. Sadly, they are largely forgotten today.

In our secular society, there are many who have forsaken their duties rooted in their baptism as "prophets" of the Lord. The burden of correcting others may be too heavy to bear for those who are disciples of Jesus. Who are they? Parents, teachers, coaches, scout leaders, elected officials and others in positions of authority. Their salvation is linked to their fervor in caring for their flock. To permit a brother or son to perish in sin without extending a helping hand is a betrayal, an act of cowardice and selfishness, for which Our Lord will demand a strict account. The understandable fear of losing popularity or of being accused of rigidity can never justify washing our hands of the matter or letting things slide.

Today's readings remind us that discipleship is not easy, and is very often costly. But we should never despair. Always keep in mind that we are speaking for the Lord and in His behalf.

Amen!