

We often say, "It's none of my business." We don't want to get involved in other people's affairs; we don't want to be bothered by others. We say to ourselves, "As long as you don't bother me, I don't care what you do." About this attitude, God says to us in the first reading that he will hold us responsible for the death of people who are wicked, if we don't warn them. God tells us we have a responsibility to tell others about their faults, a responsibility that extends even to the wicked. If we don't say something upon someone's wrongdoing, we are at fault.

In today's gospel, Jesus also says, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone." He does not say to go and tell your neighbors. He says to go and tell the person who is at fault, privately. We are often afraid of telling others that they are wrong, perhaps because we feel that we are not perfect either. Nevertheless, we have the obligation to lead others to the right way. Of course, we need to discern and be sure of what is right. And we need to learn the skill of how to advise others. Relying on justice alone is not the way to succeed. And often, we need tact and diplomacy when conflicts arise in families, to promote peace and harmony. But the important point to remember in advising others is the one St. Paul teaches us in today's second reading. "The one who loves another has fulfilled the law." St. Paul stressed that love is the core of advice. When we love others, they will really change. In other words, we should advise not based on justice, but on love. If we don't have true love but only justice, then we will fail. Justice without love doesn't change anything.

We can learn this from the story of *Les Misérables*. Jean Valjean stole a piece of bread. He was jailed for this. After being released from jail, he couldn't escape from his past. His criminal record made everyone he met prejudiced against him. He couldn't be hired. Little by little, he became bitter and increased his hatred against others. One day, he happened to stay in a church for a night and he met a priest who was very kind to him. The priest welcomed him and gave him food and shelter. This was the first time Jean was treated kindly in his life. And he began to feel his conscience. But nevertheless, while the priest was sleeping, he stole a silver dish and ran away. He was caught by the police and brought back to the church. When the police asked the priest if the church was missing a silver dish, the priest answered: "This dish is what I gave him as a gift." And he also gave him a candle stick made of silver.

After this happening, Jean Valjean became a new person. He totally changed and became a mayor who was admired by his people. He became a person who cared for the poor, and practiced love of neighbor.

From this story, we may learn that advice is not merely pointing of the other's mistakes. If the priest had insisted only on justice, he could not have changed Jean Valjean. But he covered his fault with love. And his love changed him totally. Today, Jesus tells us that we must give advice to others when they are going on the wrong path, but we must do it not

simply with justice, but with love. Then may we create a community of love in which everyone cares for each other. In loving each other can we succeed in advising others well. And by loving each other can we make a gathering in which Jesus will be with us.

Fr. James