

To admonish the sinner begins by admonishing one's self. After all, we are all sinners. Humility is the virtue by which we recognize our sinfulness and our weakness, thus realizing that we ourselves depend upon God's mercy to forgive us our sins and upon His grace to strengthen us to resist sin in the future. Without humility, we will not admit our sins honestly to ourselves and, when needed, to others also. Since human weakness is always present due to Original Sin and our own past personal sins, we know that we must struggle each day to resist evil and do good. The Bible says that even the just person falls seven times a day. (cf. Prov. 24:16) In biblical terms a "just person" meant a holy person. So even the saints had their sins and needed to remind themselves constantly of the danger of sinning. They needed always to beware of falling again. Jesus Himself told the apostles in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into the test." (Mt. 26:41) When we "pray," we strengthen ourselves to resist sin by asking God for the grace to carry out His Will every day. When we "watch," we are vigilant to avoid the occasions of sin, namely, any person, place, or thing that would lead us to offend God.

To admonish others effectively, there are two other points we must keep in mind. First, we must practice what we preach. In other words, we have to be working at striving for holiness and avoiding sin in our own lives if we expect others to do the same. It has been said, "I can't hear what you are saying because of what you are doing!" The approach, "Do what I say and not what I do," will never work. The second point is to avoid the terrible attitude of self-righteousness with its judgmental view of others. Self-righteousness puts a person into the mindset of the Pharisees who were quick to condemn sin in others but overlooked it in themselves. This was the point of Jesus' challenge to them in the Gospel story of the woman caught in adultery. (cf. Jn 8:1 ff) They were quite ready to condemn this woman for her sin. In fact, they challenged Jesus on whether she should be stoned or not, according to the law of Moses. Jesus did not say "yes," nor did He say "no." He simply challenged them in return: "Let the one among you who has no sin cast the first stone." Then the Gospel tells us He began to write on the ground. Whatever He wrote apparently referred to each individual's sins because as each one saw what Our Blessed Lord wrote, they dropped their stones and walked away. To carry out this work of admonishing the sinner, a person must have a sense of compassion for human weakness, and we can only learn that by recognizing our own weaknesses. If we fail to do so, we will be throwing a lot of stones at other people, and this would not be the Gospel attitude.

The basic reason that we admonish sinners is because their salvation may well be in jeopardy. As mentioned already, their salvation is the greatest good and need in their lives. If a person were drowning, and we were standing near a life preserver, and we did nothing to throw that life preserver out to that person so that person could be saved, this would be a terrible act of lack of love. It is even worse if souls are in jeopardy of their eternal loss from God, and we say nothing to make them realize the moral danger they are in. So even greater than all our bodily needs is the spiritual need to be set free from sin and receive the life of God. To admonish a sinner means, first of all, to call someone to conversion. Jesus Himself did this from the very outset of

His public ministry when He proclaimed, "The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Good News!" (Mk :15). We can call people to conversion in different ways. Sometimes it comes by formal preaching, such as at a parish mission or a retreat, or maybe in a witness talk of a conversion story of one's own life. Another way is in a one-on-one talk or a small group discussion. Even yet another call can be non-verbal, simply by the good example of refusing to participate in wrongdoing. Good example has a great witness power to it!

Silence in the Face of Evil Is Disastrous.

There is an old saying, "All that is needed for evil to succeed is for good people to say or do nothing!" Silence in the face of evil allows that evil to continue and even to spread. Such a terrible silence must be broken. To paraphrase one of Archbishop Sheen's famous quotes, "We don't need a voice that speaks when everybody else is speaking; we need a voice that speaks when everybody else is silent!" This is especially applicable to those who have positions of responsibility for guiding others. Sacred Scripture, for example, contains certain images for those in positions of leadership among God's people. They are to be like shepherds (cf. Jn 10:1 ff) guarding their sheep, ready even to lay down their lives to protect their sheep from harm. If they remain silent, they are simply running away like hired hands! Again, they are compared to watchmen in their towers, guarding the city from attack (cf. Ez 33:1 ff). However, if they see the enemy coming but fail to sound the alarm, the city will be destroyed. Finally, St. Gregory the Great uses the image of the watchdog that guards against thieves and other intruders. But, he says, if the watchdog cannot bark, it is useless!

Parents must also fulfill their responsibility as best they can. Disciplining children in an appropriate way may save both children and parents from a lot of future grief and sorrow. As the old proverb wisely teaches, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." The "rod" here would be better understood as a proper correction or verbal discipline rather than simply a form of physical punishment. Even fraternal correction, given early enough and lovingly enough, can make a big difference! It serves as a clear light during a moment of serious darkness in a person's life.

St. James in his letter tells us that there is a great reward in store for those who help sinners find their way to Christ. They will save the soul of the erring brother or sister in Christ from being lost and at the same time, they will cover a "multitude" of their own sins because God will be very merciful to them for their work of mercy to another! (cf. James 5:19-20) We should ask God to give us a fervent desire for the salvation of souls. Great saints and mystics who write about the spiritual life assure us that this desire is something that grows intensely as one draws closer to God. This desire will strengthen the conviction to admonish those who need it, even when the task is quite challenging. In this way, we will help to satisfy the unspeakable thirst of Jesus upon the cross for the salvation of all men and women for whom He was laying down His life in such great suff