

23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Year A (2017)  
Forty Martyrs'; St Mary's;  
St Gerard's; St Bede's (6.15)

Imagine: You are disturbed in the night by the sound of breaking glass and you get up and look out of the window. You see two people in the act of climbing through the window of a neighbour's house. What do you do?

Imagine: You are disturbed in the night by the sound of breaking glass and you get up and look out of the window. You see two people in the act of climbing through the window of a neighbour's house., and you immediately recognise one of them. It is your son. What do you do? Is your action different in this second illustration?

Imagine: you are at work and you see a colleague stealing materials. This is not petty pilfering but serious theft. You have had suspicions before but now you have evidence. What do you do?

Ezekiel said in the first reading: "If you do not speak to warn the wicked man to renounce his ways then he shall die for his sin, but I will hold you responsible for his death; if however, you do warn a wicked man to renounce his wicked ways and repent and he does not repent then he shall die for his sin but you yourself will have saved your life."

"Am I my brother's keeper?" asked Cain after he had murdered his brother. Literally he asks, "Am I shepherd of my brother?" who was, of course a shepherd. That is ever the way of those who want to wash their hands of responsibility. The Bible is consistent in its opposition. There can be no looking the other way. We all have a responsibility to one another. We are guardians to one another. If we shirk this God-given duty we are guilty.

Imagine a further scenario: You do not like the way a superior is treating you. Their attitude is cynical, sarcastic and belittling. Do you accept it stoically or do you take action. In such circumstances some will mutter complaints to colleagues but allow the abuse to continue. Thus can the resentment grow and fester and poison, corroding every aspect of life, at home as well as at work, and yet it all goes on unchallenged.

We all have a remarkable and deep capacity for finding excuses, for tolerating what is intolerable and compromising with injustice. This is accommodating evil. It allows evil to thrive.

Matthew's community clearly had issues that needed resolving. He gives rules for dealing with grievances in the community. He describes progressive stages moving from the informal – a quiet word in private; to a full blown public hearing. Anyone

familiar with the procedures of industrial and judicial disputes will recognise the pattern. It is wise and well tried. The stages are important. The less fuss and publicity in gaining a resolution means less damage. A quiet word sensitively spoken can open someone's eyes to effects they had not realised. Such a step, to go and challenge someone is a courageous move, and can be a feat of diplomacy to do it without aggression. Often times the fear of a violent response charges the encounter with a tension that causes confrontation.

However, if the informal approaches is successful friendships can result. If the softly softly gambit fails the process advances and witnesses and due process are required. Seldom can there be a happy ending. Nevertheless, such procedures are necessary to protect the weak, defend the defenceless and allow justice to be real and effective.

There are too many examples across the sweep of history from Cain to recent Panorama programmes of people not speaking out and the consequences are horrific. We know this from our own experiences in the Church. But to protest takes guts. Speaking truth to power in any form is a risk as power tends to lash out when it is cornered.

But the alternative allows evil to thrive, which is what will ever happen when the good remain silent.