

Homily for the Twenty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)  
St. Joseph's Neier September 6-7, 2014  
Rev. Kevin Schmittgens

Central Idea: Love means confronting the other and calling them to growth.

*If your brother sins against you,  
go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.  
If he listens to you, you have won over your brother.*

Sometimes, it just doesn't pay to be encouraging and supportive.

This past summer, most of America was enamored by the play of Mo'ne Davis. Mo'ne was the grade schooler who was the first female ever to win a game in the Little League World Series. Quite an accomplishment! But even though she shines on the baseball diamond, her favorite sport is basketball. She even said that her dream was to play for the UConn Huskies, one of the premier female college basketball programs in the country.

When that dream was relayed to the coach of the Huskies, Geno Auriemma, he called the little girl to congratulate her and to encourage her to further success. Before he even made the call, he checked if it would have violated one of the NCAA's archaic and antediluvian rules. A young girl in grade school would not be considered a recruiting prospect and the nature of the call was supportive and therefore permitted.

Apparently, it was a short, yet thoughtful call. Auriemma told the girl that he was impressed by the way she was handling the pressure of the Little League World Series and to make sure people were treating her like a baseball player and "not like, oh, look at this girl playing baseball." It is a feel good story. Until...

Someone with a chip on their shoulder, complained to the NCAA, and this is the key part, did it *anonymously*. The NCAA, incredibly in my opinion, ruled that the coach had indeed violated a secondary rule. Auriemma was stunned that someone would file a complaint. "It shows you what is wrong not only for things that go on but also with some of the people that I coach against."

We live in a world of The Anonymous Critic and The Anonymous Complaint. Although there may be some reasons for it, like a whistleblower being fired, I really dislike this trend in our society. Hiding behind the cloak of invisibility, people can say anything about anyone and not worry about any of the repercussions of their complaint. It is the way of the coward.

Our Lord, in our gospel today calls us to be people of integrity, honesty and straightforwardness. He tells us that we not only *can* correct a brother or sister who has wronged us, but also we *must* do so. But our Lord also realizes that correction is something that can be abused. And so he gives us some guidelines by which correction is to take place.

First, we must go first to the individual themselves with the correction. If you take anything from this homily, take this idea! Often when we have a complaint, we go talk to everyone else EXCEPT the person who wronged us. We put it on Facebook. We complain to our adoring public. We will even complain to our pets! But actually talk to the one person who has actually sinned against us. We could never do that. We live in a wimpy society in which individuals fail to go to the person themselves. Occasionally in my priesthood, the bishop or a pastor or a principal will receive a letter complaining about what I am doing (actually this happens once in a blue moon), instead of coming to me with the complaint. Jesus tells us, in effect, to grow up, to be adults, don't gossip or beat around the bush, but confront the actual individual.

"Bring it to the church." Second, we need to check our correction with others, if and only if we have not received satisfaction. I think it is a good idea in general to touch base with other people whose viewpoints we trust. In the past, I have written letters expressing to individuals my anger about something. I have about three people I bounce these ideas off of. They tell me whether I am way off base, or whether I have a legitimate gripe. This is a life-giving and growth enhancing thing.

Third, when all other things have failed, some hard lines may need to be drawn. But this should only, only, only occur if all other avenues have failed. This is a tough call and happily, I have never been put into a position like that, yet. But this hard line presumes that you have done all the other work first.

I would hope that both here at the parish and also at school people feel free to approach me with their issues. One of my failings is that, at times, I seem unapproachable. But I would much rather deal with problems face to face, as adult humans do, rather than deal with a nebulous, vague and unclear complaint from someone who hides behind a protective veil of secrecy.

In other words, to the person who complained about Geno Auriemma, either be a courageous person of integrity or get a life. And if Mo'ne can't go to SLU or Mizzou, I hope she goes to U Conn.