My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I’ll let you in on a little secret: I don’t like to be corrected. Yeah, I know, not many people do. It’s awkward. There’s that moment of trying to figure out how to take the person, and if I take them “wrong,” I end up getting defensive. I think I get defensive because for so many years, I would take every correction personally, and it would end up making me feel like a failure, like I was nothing. The defense mechanism stirs up and says (subconsciously, of course), “I don’t want to feel horrible about myself, I don’t want to feel that I am worthless, so I will reject their correction.” There are, of course, some precious times – grace-filled times – when I can receive a critique from another, accept the good in it, and reject the reaction that I am a failure… but these moments are not as frequent as I would like.

A lot of times it is easier just to sit back and watch others do the wrong thing than to correct them. Maybe we fear that “defensive” reaction and that maybe there will be a vile response. Maybe we genuinely care about the other, but we’re afraid to make them feel bad. So we (or, at least, I) sit back on our laurels and avoid confrontation.

**But this is not the message of Jesus.**

Think about all the times that Jesus called out the sinner, whether it was groups, like the Pharisees for laying up burdens too hard for others to carry (Luke 11:46), or whole towns, like Bethsaida and Chorazin which had seen great miracles and had not converted (Matthew 11:21). He did this, however, out of a deep sense of love for them, as He was trying to draw them away from sin – that which separates them from the love of God – and back into God’s embrace.

Today’s First Reading and Gospel tell us that we must act in the same way. Jesus gives us the process for dealing with people in our lives (like our brothers) who sin against us. Jesus doesn’t tell us to lay down and take it like a doormat. He calls us to go to the person and “**tell him his fault**” (Matthew 18:15). First alone, then with one or two others, then with the Church, if he doesn’t listen. This is hard.

Why does Jesus tell us to do this?

There are a few reasons that I can think of. The first is to keep us from sinning – again, that which would separate us from God. In our human nature, we need to process and talk about our hurt. Jesus doesn’t want us to do this in a sinful way, though. The natural tendency could be to gossip or detract the person (*gossip* is telling unkind stories about others that we don’t know are true; *detraction* is speaking unkind truths about others).

Another reason I think Jesus tells us to go to the person and tell them their fault, is so that we can find healing. If the “offender” is moved to conversion, to a change of heart, there can be a reconciliation between the two. It also gives opportunity to clarify misunderstandings (and I have found personally that that is the primary cause of most hurt in my life… most people don’t want to hurt others, but misunderstandings cause division!).

The third reason is the most important – we do it out of love. This is key, because *God IS love*! We don’t tell others their fault so that we can lord it over them, make them feel guilty, or judge them. We are commanded by Jesus to confront the person because of love. Jesus knows when we sin against another, we are not only hurting that relationship, but our relationship with God. I think about my mother asking me to stop arguing with my sister because it hurt my mother to see us at odds with each other. When we love people, we want them to be able to get along. When they don’t, it hurts us. How much more so with God who loves us infinitely more than my mother loves my sister and me! Jesus see the sin and how it hurts or breaks relationship with God, and He wants more than anything for that relationship to be mended. So He commands us to strive to bring reconciliation *because we love the other and want him or her to get to heaven and be with Jesus forever!*

The world tried to tell us that there is no sin. Jesus says, “there is sin, but don’t be afraid, I have conquered sin!” If we turn to Jesus in repentance, then He will forgive us. There! All done! Gone! We are called to reach out to those who have hurt us because sin is real, its effects are real and eternal, and Jesus wants us, out of love, to help draw the other back into relationship with God and with us, His children.

**Dear Jesus, give us the courage today *lovingly* to do the necessary work of fraternal correction – not being afraid of anger or hurt, but, in love, calling Your people back to Your Heart!**