



Admonish the Sinner

As spoken by Father Ken Geraci

“Admonishing the sinner.”

When we talk about admonishing a sinner, we want to make a distinction between admonishing a sinner and what we have previously spoken of regarding “informing the ignorant.”

Specifically, in the context that we’re dealing with, is this distinction: admonishing a sinner is admonishing bad behavior that falls short or offends God.

Meanwhile, informing the ignorant—“the ignorant” being a person who lacks knowledge of a moral topic—is to offer instruction to someone on the way we’re called to live and be.

There’s oftentimes an overlap in these things, specifically in the case in which a person may not be aware that what they’re doing is, in fact, sinful. So, there’s a balance to be struck here: when we approach someone in these contexts, we want to make sure that we’re following the principles we’ve previously discussed.

Let’s talk a little more about this concept of admonishing a sinner. We already asked the question: does the individual know that they’re sinning? Because this is going to change the way that you address and approach them. St. Thomas Aquinas gives us a couple of principles in dealing with approaching another person in the context of fraternal correction.

St. Thomas says that, when we offer fraternal correction to our friend, family member, or a brother in religion, or a member of the church, we want to do so rarely; we want to do so respectfully; and we want to do so privately. Rarely, respectfully, and privately.

Again, we don’t want to call a person out and embarrass them—we want to make sure we’re treating them with respect, and we want to make sure that we’re not trying to micromanage someone else’s life



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Now, of course we have to make the distinction: when you're a parent and you're dealing with children, that's called parenting, right? We have to lead our children and correct them and that happens often. There's a difference between parenting and offering fraternal correction in our society.

So, we look for those opportunities to approach those people, obviously through prayer, love, openness, and encouragement; but also privately, respectfully, and rarely looking at those opportunities to call that person to a higher behavior.

You know, when we admonish a sinner, one of the big challenges we have is to make the distinction between the goodness of who they are as a human person, versus their bad or inappropriate behavior. This is the distinction in admonishing a sinner and informing the ignorant. It's that we're dealing with behavior in this case of admonishing a sinner. We're calling a person to be the fullness of the person they are called to be in the eyes of Jesus Christ, in the eyes of God. Calling them to live a life higher than this world offers.

You know, there are many behaviors in this world that the world calls virtuous—but God calls sin. And so, we're called to be more of God than of this world.

So again, recognize that when we admonish a sinner, we're recognizing that their behavior does not match their dignity. That's what we're doing when we admonish a sinner or invite them to be better than their behavior.