



# FAITH CIRCLES

WEEKLY SMALL GROUP CATECHESIS

23RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME • YEAR A

## SUNDAY GOSPEL

### *Brotherly correction*

MATTHEW 18:15-20

Jesus said to his disciples: 'If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, between your two selves.

If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you: the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain any charge.

But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community; and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a pagan or a tax collector.

'I tell you solemnly, whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.



Artist unknown

'I tell you solemnly once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my

Father in heaven. For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them.' ■

## GOSPEL REFLECTION

*Mr Sean Donovan*

*Chairperson – Macarthur Social Justice Network*



Charlie shared her story, how for decades she did not speak to her mum because of some grievance. She stewed in her mind.

How dare this outrage! But toward the end of her mother's life, Charlie went to see her and they were reconciled.

Charlie said it was a burden lifted and how blessed she feels that she could spend time with mum in those last few months. Most of us carry similar loads.

Jesus tells us not to wait. If we have a problem with someone, we should go straight away and sort it out. If that doesn't work, then get help from others or even the whole community. Leave no option untried. If none of that works, then "treat him like a pagan or tax collector."

How did Jesus treat sinners and tax collectors? Did he abandon them? No! He continued to eat and drink with them and invite them to join him. Jesus calls us to love everyone, like God the Father. How we loose and bind our relationships on Earth are how they are for eternity.

Our adversarial legal system insists on winners and losers. Jesus invites another path, meeting in his name. ■

## A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS



The Gospel this Sunday, taken from Matthew, Chapter 18, presents the theme of brotherly correction within the community of believers: that is, how I must correct another

Christian when he does what is not good. Jesus teaches us that, should my Christian brother commit a sin against me, offend me, I must be charitable toward him and, first of all, speak with him personally, explain to him what he said or did that was wrong. What if the brother doesn't listen to me? Jesus proposes a progressive intervention: first, return and speak to him with two or three other people, so he may be more aware of his error; if, despite this, he does not accept the admonition, the community must be told; and should he also refuse to listen to the community, he must be made aware of the rift and estrangement that he himself has caused, weakening the communion with his brothers in the faith.

The stages of this plan show the effort that the Lord asks of his community in order to accompany the one who transgresses, so that he or she is not lost. It is important above all to prevent any clamour in the news and gossip in the community — this is the first thing, this must be avoided. “Go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone” (v. 15). The approach is one of sensitivity, prudence, humility, attention

towards the one who committed a fault, to avoid wounding or killing the brother with words. Because, you know, words too can kill! When I speak, when I make an unfair criticism, when I “flay” a brother with my tongue, this is killing another person's reputation! Words kill too. Let us pay attention to this. At the same time, the discretion of speaking to him alone is to avoid needlessly humiliating the sinner. It is discussed between the two, no one is aware of it and then it's over. This requirement also takes into account the consequent series of interventions calling for the involvement of a few witnesses and then actually of the community. The purpose is to help the person realize what he has done, and that through his fault he has offended not only one, but everyone. But it also helps us to free ourselves from anger or resentment which only causes harm: that bitterness of heart which brings anger and resentment, and which leads us to insult and aggression. It's terrible to see an insult or taunt issue from the mouth of a Christian. It is ugly. Do you understand? Do not insult! To insult is not Christian. Understood? To insult is not Christian.

Actually, before God we are all sinners and in need of forgiveness. All of us. Indeed, Jesus told us not to judge. Fraternal correction is a mark of the love and communion which must reign in the Christian community; it is, rather, a mutual service that we can and must render to one

another. To reprove a brother is a service, and it is possible and effective only if each one recognizes oneself to be a sinner and in need of the Lord's forgiveness. The same awareness that enables me to recognize the fault of another, even before that, reminds me that I have likewise made mistakes and I am often wrong.

This is why, at the beginning of Mass, every time, we are called before the Lord to recognize that we are sinners, expressing through words and gestures sincere repentance of the heart. And we say: “Have mercy on me, Lord. I am a sinner! I confess to Almighty God my sins”. And we don't say: “Lord, have mercy on this man who is beside me, or this woman, who are sinners”. No! “Have mercy on me!”. We are all sinners and in need of the Lord's forgiveness. It is the Holy Spirit who speaks to our spirit and makes us recognize our faults in light of the Word of Jesus. And Jesus himself invites us all, saints and sinners, to his table, gathering us from the crossroads, from diverse situations of life (cf. Mt 22:9-10). And among the conditions in common among those participating in the Eucharistic celebration, two are fundamental in order to go to Mass correctly: we are all sinners and God grants his mercy to all. These are the two conditions which open wide the doors that we might enter Mass properly. We must always remember this before addressing a brother in brotherly correction. ■

### TALKING POINTS

1. In this passage Jesus teaches how hard, but loving conversations, are necessary for unity and growth as disciples. How might we initiate or approach to these conversations so that they are a catalyst for building love, trust, forgiveness and unity in our lives?
2. One thing we are all united in is our need for God's mercy yet our words and judgements of others can humiliate, wound and kill. Discuss the need to ‘yes’ challenge behaviour in ourselves and others, but to do so with the sensitivity, prudence, humility and attention towards the other described by Pope Francis.

### PRAYER POINTS

**Pray for Each Other:** Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

**Response:** *Lord, give us the grace of repentance, that we might encounter the power of your mercy, and the unity of the Holy Spirit.*

**Reflect:** Ask the Spirit to show you who you might have wronged. Would anyone reading this passage think, they need to speak to me. Similarly, who would I want to speak to, not out of a desire to be right or vindicated, so that in the Words of Jesus you might, ‘have won back your brother’ through dialogue that leads to forgiveness and unity.

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, your mercy swamps a repentant heart. Free us from anger and resentment. Fill us with forgiveness and generosity of spirit as we choose words that build life and unity.