

GOSPEL*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 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.

'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.'

REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS*10 September 2023*

Today the Gospel speaks to us about fraternal correction (cf. Mt 18:15-20), which is one of the highest expressions of love, and also one of the most demanding, because it is not easy to correct others. When a brother in faith wrongs you, then you, without rancour, help him, correct him: help by correcting.

Unfortunately, however, often the first thing that is created around those who make a mistake is gossip, in which everyone comes to know the mistake, complete with details, apart from the person concerned! This is not right, brothers and sisters; this does not please God. I never tire of repeating that gossip is a plague on the life of people and communities, because it leads to division, it leads to suffering, it leads to scandal; it never helps improve, it never helps grow. A great spiritual teacher, Saint Bernard, said that idle curiosity and superficial words are the first steps on the ladder of pride, which does not lead upwards, but downwards, plunging man towards perdition and ruin (cf. The twelve steps of humility and pride).

Instead, Jesus teaches us to behave in a different way. This is what he says today: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone" (v. 15). Speak to him about it "face to face",

speaking about it fairly, to help him understand where he has erred. And do this for his own good, overcoming embarrassment and finding true courage, which is not to slander, but to say things to his face with meekness and gentleness.

But, we might ask, what if this is not enough? What if he does not understand? Then we must look for help. Beware, though: not from the group that gossips! Jesus says: "Take one or two others along with you" (v. 16), meaning people who genuinely want to lend a hand to this brother or sister who has erred.

And if he still does not understand? Then, Jesus says, involve the community. But here too, let us be clear: this does not mean to pillory a person, putting him to shame publicly, but rather to unite everyone's efforts to help him change. Pointing the finger is not good; in fact, it often makes it more difficult for the wrongdoer to recognize his mistake. Rather, the community must make him or her feel that, while it condemns the mistake, it is close to the person with prayer and affection, always ready to offer forgiveness, understanding, and to start over.

And so, let us ask ourselves: how should I behave with a person who wrongs me? Do I keep it bottled up and accumulate resentment? "You will pay for it". Those words which come so often: "you will pay for it..." Do I talk about it behind their backs? "Do you know what he did?"; and so on... Or am I brave, courageous, and try to talk about it to him or her? Do I pray for him or her, ask for help to do good? And do our communities take care of those who fall, so that they can get back up and start a new life? Do they point fingers or open their arms? What do you do: do you point the finger or open your arms?

May Mary, who continued to love even as she heard people condemn her Son, help us to always seek the path of good.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Pope Francis describes fraternal correction as one of the highest expressions of love. Why do you think Jesus asks us to address wrongdoing directly rather than talk about it with others?



Heart: When someone hurts, disappoints, or frustrates you, what is your usual response? What makes it difficult to approach them with honesty, gentleness, and love?



Hands: Pope Francis says that communities should help people get back up rather than shame them. How can you be part of creating a culture of encouragement, forgiveness, and second chances this week?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (for example, “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the ‘Glory Be’.