

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

GOSPEL

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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.

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.'

(Matthew 18:15–20)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- In the ancient world, the testimony of two witnesses was needed for any charge to be upheld in a civil or religious court. We see many examples of this practice in the gospels—for example, John 9:18.
- Formal exclusion from the Church is called excommunication. Today it is rarely used, but through history, many people, even saints, have been excommunicated. Galileo was excommunicated during the Renaissance for his views on science—later proved to be correct. This excommunication was rescinded only in recent years. Even Australia's own St Mary MacKillop was once excommunicated!

EXPLORING THE WORD

The gospel readings for this week and next week come from a section of Matthew that deals with ways the community might regulate its behaviour. Clearly there were some in the group who were behaving in ways that brought the community into disrepute and were contrary to the teaching of Jesus. The question was how the community should confront such issues of human sinfulness and help each other in the spirit of love that Jesus professed. Matthew recalls the words of Jesus to suggest a way forward in this dilemma.

This text comes immediately after the parable of the lost sheep, where the shepherd expends all possible effort to find the lost one and bring it back to the fold. For Matthew, the main point of that parable is the joy that the master expresses when the lost one returns.

That point is emphasised in this text when Matthew again suggests that all possible effort must be made to correct those in the community who err before taking the final step of exclusion from the group. Even then, all is not lost, and Matthew reminds his community that they should pray together and that their prayers will be heard.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Discuss ways in which conflict is dealt with in our society, families or workplaces. Try to identify both the positive and negative elements we find. How can we handle this in a more productive manner?
- Have you ever been in the position of being torn between 'turning a blind eye' to a wrongdoing or confronting the culprit? Share your experiences and explain what you did to resolve the situation.
- One of the greatest prayers about being a peace maker is the prayer often associated with St Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

O divine master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and in dying that we are born to eternal life.

My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God

