

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 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.'

A REFLECTION BY 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". 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.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do you handle conflict or being wronged by another?
- Jesus asks us to act with sensitivity and appropriate confidentiality in dealing with issues of wrongdoing, respecting the dignity of each person. How do you feel about the pattern he puts forward?
- Pope Francis suggests that our starting point is the realisation that we are all sinners, we have all done wrong. How does this affect the way in which you enter discussions with someone about what they've done wrong?

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 (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to 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 reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.