



Matthew 18:15-20

15 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. 16 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. 17 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. 18 '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. 19 '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. 20 For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them.'

Other readings: Ezekiel 33:7-9 Psalm 94 (95) Romans 13:8-10

The Gospel of Matthew contains five great speeches of Jesus, in which it appears that the evangelist has gathered together the teaching of Jesus on particular themes. Chapter 18 of the gospel contains the 'community discourse', which deals with issues relevant to the daily life of the church.

The question of correction of those who do wrong cannot be avoided. It is the responsibility of fellow-Christians to challenge and correct. The prophet Ezekiel deals with a similar issue: the responsibility of the prophet to confront wickedness. In both cases there is a need to speak the truth in difficult circumstances.

The gospel passage goes on to speak of the authority of the church to 'bind and loose', which is precisely the authority given to Peter earlier in his dialogue with Christ in chapter 16. Peter must always speak for and with the church, for and with the community of those who follow Christ. Finally, Jesus tells us of his presence when even two or three gather in his name. We are encouraged to listen to others before making decisions about the life of the church.

St Paul's words in the second reading are surely relevant here: 'Love is the one thing that cannot hurt your neighbour.' Love might be defined as acting for the real good of the other person. In dealing with sensitive issues in the life of the church love must always be the guide, but it is sometimes quite difficult to work out what love requires.

How can you know if and how to correct someone who has done wrong?

Can love of neighbour become an excuse for collusion?

Let us pray for wisdom and courage to confront difficult situations with both love and truth.

Let us pray for a deeper awareness of the presence of Christ when we gather in his name.