



Things to Ponder

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Reflections – Gospel of Matthew 18:15-20

Introduction: Steps Toward Reconciliation

This weekend's Gospel reading is taken from a chapter of Matthew's Gospel, which is sometimes called "the discourse on church order." In this passage, Matthew speaks to practical matters: How do the early Christian communities deal with discipline and order to keep harmony and some semblance of unity among a diverse group of believers? What are some steps for reconciliation?

In this Gospel, Jesus addresses a common occurrence in the Christian communities: a dispute between two members of the Church. He then outlines a process for settling such matters fairly. The first step is direct and fraternal communication between the two members to resolve the issue respectively on their own. If that fails, the next step is to involve one or two others from the community to "get to the truth" – relying on impartial witnesses or facilitators. If that does not work, then the matter is brought before the whole community. If that fails, then the person is to be treated like "a Gentile or tax collector." (It is not clear from commentaries whether this means to exclude the person from the community or to emulate Jesus' practice of befriending such people.)

It is important to note that Jesus does not discourage disagreements within the community of the Church. Obviously, any community is all too human – with members who possess various different viewpoints and who often see reality through their own experiences and assumptions. Jesus acknowledges the reality of conflict and error and offers his disciples a fair and just means for addressing such matters. The Gospels are real! For they deal with a real world – and a human Church!

At the conclusion of this passage, there is an uplifting message of hope. Jesus is always present with the community and will guide the Church in its relations. If decisions are taken in prayer, then the community can be assured of God's assistance.

I would invite you to take time to read and ponder the words from the Gospel of Matthew 18:15-20.

What word or words caught your attention?

What in this passage comforted you?

What in this passage challenged you?

Identify a situation where you disagreed with someone. How did you resolve it?

Further Questions and Reflections:

Conflict and disagreements are a natural part of any relationships: marriage; families; friendships, co-workers; yes – even parishes! Yet, within these relationships, we have an important opportunity to learn how to resolve disagreements fairly by treating people with love and respect. What kinds of things produce disagreements within your relationships? How do you handle them? What steps do you take?

In this Gospel, Jesus is gently reminding us that being members of the parish community, we are responsible for one another – and one of our responsibilities may be that of “correcting” our brother or sister. This is never an easy task. Fraternal correction must always be inspired by charity and respect for the other – whom we disagree with. It is one of the spiritual works of mercy. We often need to pray for the wisdom to find the right way—the right words!—to “correct” someone’s values/beliefs that do not reflect the Gospel. Have you ever participated in an “intervention” of an addicted family member or friend who was hooked on drugs/alcohol? What happened? Name your feelings in this tricky process.

How do you take the first step to heal a broken relationship, if the hurt done to you is very painful? How do you become reconciled? Is it even possible?

This Gospel emphasizes the importance of active listening (not just hearing) and the role of communication and dialogue—which is another way of saying that we should seek consensus— “a win-win situation for all.” To what extent do you seek consensus, or do you rather work to make sure that your will prevails?

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