

Father John's Gospel Reflection



Gospel

GOSPEL – SUNDAY, 10th September 2017

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Matt 18: 15-20)

If your brother or sister listens to you, you will have won that person back.

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 will 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.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection

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Is it the problem of insiders and outsiders? The first hearers of Matthew were in a dilemma. Were they to be outsiders- leaving the religion of Judaism and founding a new movement as the followers of the Way, or were they to be insiders- just another Jewish sect? In recent times, we have learnt to recognise more clearly how Christian and Jewish authorities were trying to secure clearer boundaries between the two traditions.

This passage from Matthew is an insider's text for outsiders. From Matthew's perspective, Jesus is both warning and assuring those inside the young Christian church. It is a church; however, whose members stand outside the main streams of both religious and civil practise.

These early Christians faced a struggle with their own identity. They claimed their Jewish heritage, but were finding it difficult to practise their convictions in the Jewish synagogues.

Now for Christians to survive, strong boundaries were needed. Members understood themselves as belonging to a new family. They were brothers and sisters to one another- not defined by race, or nationality, but by allegiance to Jesus. This reality is reflected in Matthew's Gospel. The author is aware that some members would be tempted to return to their former ways. For Matthew this was sinning, and such persons were wolves in sheep's clothing, hearers but not doers, weeds among wheat, hypocrites and worthless slaves.

1. Little in the way of religious dialogue can be gained by Catholics thinking of themselves as insiders, and all others as outsiders.
2. Today, In Australia, let us be wary of those politicians who would designate insiders and outsiders – Muslims and others, refugees and others, welfare recipients and others.
3. Remember the words of Jesus to we who may think of ourselves as insiders- "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." (Matt 28:19)

Take home Message