

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time



We are likely here because, at some point, we asked ourselves some form of the question, "What can I do for a loved one who has gotten off track?" We might hide it for a while, protect it at times, deny how bad it has gotten, and think we can take care of it ourselves. The Christian lifestyle, rooted in fellowship since its beginning, can provide us with tools and guidance along the path suggested by Jesus.

Seemingly in direct response to the question mentioned above, Jesus shares an outline with his disciples in this Sunday's Gospel Reading about how to offer fraternal correction if another has fallen to sinful habits and addictive behaviors. But first, Jesus reminds them (and us) of how far our Creator is willing to go in His pursuit of us (Mt. 18:12-14):

*If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray,
will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills
and go in search of the stray?
And if he finds it, amen, I say to you,
he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that
did not stray.
In just the same way, it is not the will of your
heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost.*

And then the instructions:

*Jesus said to his disciples:
"If your brother sins against you,
go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.
If he listens to you, you have won over your brother.
If he does not listen,
take one or two others along with you,
so that 'every fact may be established
on the testimony of two or three witnesses.'
If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church.
If he refuses to listen even to the church,
then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax
collector. Amen, I say to you,
whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,
and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in
heaven.
Again, amen, I say to you,
if two of you agree on earth
about anything for which they are to pray,
it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father.
For where two or three are gathered together in my
name,
there am I in the midst of them."*

Jesus mentions four steps to take if the previous is ineffective:

1. Speak directly to the person
2. Gather a couple of trusted people to affirm or question your loving concern
3. Bring your concerns to a community of believers, asking for prayer and support
4. Treat them with love and mercy while establishing healthy boundaries

Each of our situations will require variations to this, but hearing Jesus speak on the issue offers comfort, forgiveness, and His presence. We can discern these words as we reflect on a variety of relationships in our lives. The greatest defense against reverting back to our old tendencies is the act of reaching our hand out to newcomers and those still struggling with family recovery. As we do this, we enter into relationships where we receive just as much as we give of ourselves.

Similarly, we enter the Church in need of salvation and take refuge in a common vessel. Our solution is found in the grace offered by Jesus Christ. We engage him through the Word, the sacraments of the Church, and when we reach our hand out to fellow brothers and sisters. We gather today in the midst of God, who grants us the gift of faith and willingness to be here.

Yearning for God's mercy, let us continue to use our experience to grow with each other, love and pray for our addict, and accompany those struggling on the margins. At the same time, we ought to be humble and willing enough to recognize that God is the only one capable of salvation and that He is relentless.

Reflection Questions

- Recall and share about your experience of being the one lost sheep who God went off to find.
- What benefits have you experienced as a result of supporting others in recovery?
- What lessons do you take away from Jesus' remarks about fraternal correction? How might the Gospel Reading inform your own situation?

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- **Never underestimate your ability to help the addict/alcoholic who still struggles** by letting others know it can be done and sharing key spiritual principles
- Find more information and submission instructions at catholicinrecovery.com/writing-for-cir

Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Ezekiel 33:7-9

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

Second Reading: Romans 13:8-10

Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20