

19TH Wednesday in Ordinary Time
Reading 1 **EZEKIEL 9:1-7; 10:18-22**

The LORD cried loud for me to hear:
Come, you scourges of the city!
With that I saw six men coming from the
direction of the upper gate which faces the
north, each with a destroying weapon in his
hand.
In their midst was a man dressed in linen,
with a writer's case at his waist.
They entered and stood beside the bronze altar.
Then he called to the man dressed in linen
with the writer's case at his waist, saying to
him: Pass through the city, through Jerusalem,
and mark a "Thau" on the foreheads of those
who moan and groan over all the abominations
that are practiced within it.
To the others I heard the LORD say:
Pass through the city after him and strike!
Do not look on them with pity nor show any
mercy!
Old men, youths and maidens, women and
children—wipe them out!
But do not touch any marked with the "Thau";
begin at my sanctuary.
So they began with the men, the elders, who
were in front of the temple.
Defile the temple, he said to them, and fill the
courts with the slain;
then go out and strike in the city.
Then the glory of the LORD left the threshold of
the temple and rested upon the cherubim.
These lifted their wings, and I saw them rise
from the earth, the wheels rising along with
them.
They stood at the entrance of the eastern gate
of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of
Israel was up above them.
Then the cherubim lifted their wings, and the
wheels went along with them, while up above
them was the glory of the God of Israel.

Gospel **MATTHEW 18:15-20**

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."

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When Jesus says, "Amen, I say to you," I
prick up my ears. If he follows with an
"Again, amen, I say to you," I better be
paying attention.

This is the section in Matthew concerned
with the growing Christian community.
While they are young and forming in the
context of a Roman empire, Jesus is
teaching them how to live and love each
other in a Christian kingdom as brothers
and sisters.

We need look no further than our own
families to know the deep love and
sacrifice of our family members. We've
also had our hearts broken by those we
love. How does a young community of
believers, inspired by the Holy Spirit
continue to thrive when it harbors the
best and worst of human inclinations?

Jesus presents his disciples with a blueprint for resolving their anticipated grievances:ⁱ

- Try to work it out, one-to-one. If not successful...
- Get help; two or more witnesses. If not successful...
- Take it to a higher authority, the Church.

And, as Jesus has given the community the power to bind and loose, should the recalcitrant reject the Church's determination, the community may expel him (*"Treat him as a gentile or tax collector."*)ⁱⁱ

Would that this could be a model for us—a way to resolve our differences and antagonisms in such a way so as to maintain loving relationships. As Fr. Fitz, my mentor in faith, often said, "Pat, being right is not enough."ⁱⁱⁱ

So, go to the sinner. That implies person-to-person, not with an email diatribe like a prosecutor's opening statement. You would normally modify your pitch if you saw the flashes of pain or anger on your adversary's face. You wouldn't run on so long either. This allows the other to be part of a real dialogue, as if they were part of something.

If the problem cannot be resolved, if the relationship cannot be restored, one hopes there is there enough love left between the two of you to bring in 2 or 3 trusted friends, or sisters or brothers to hear what is keeping the two of you at odds. Magic, or more rightly so, Providence could happen. This is what Jesus means when he says, *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."*

In the modern life of the Church, there does not seem to be any authoritative body to whom we could take our dispute. Christians take Christians to court. The court adjudicates who's right and who's wrong; who gets paid and who has to pay. There is no consideration for any relationship after court. The relationship is ruptured.

Have we seen enough rupture in our families? In our Church? Let us gather in Jesus' name. Let us submit our lives, our wisdom and our discernment to His Holy Spirit. We are allowed to believe that fairness and justice would result and that our commitment to each other would be strengthened. Could we pray for such? Could we trust for such, that Jesus is in our very midst?

Up to now, I've been thinking from the "we" position. That I am one who was sinned against. Or that I may be one of the 2 or 3 that would help witness. Or that I would be part of the community to discern and decide.

What if, however, I am the sinner? We all go to Confession after all. We don't confess made up sins. What if in my defensiveness, I am blind to how I was the one who sinned. I've done that before. You'd be surprised about the mental gymnastics I can perform and the narratives I can weave about how I am right and everyone else is wrong. How I have the good intentions and nobody else understands.

If I am the unrepentant, recalcitrant one, I may be subject to rejection by the community. Let's make no mistake about this, I mean nothing less than excommunication- a separation from my community and my God. I would be as the gentiles and tax collectors.

All hope is not lost for that unrepentant sinner. Remember that gentiles and tax collectors were “courted” by Jesus. The Bible is the story of God’s loving and relentless pursuit of us.

In yesterday’s Mass we heard the story of the lost sheep.

*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? (Mt 18: 12)*

If I am the stray, the good Lord sends me a brother or sister to light the way. If I insist on “my way”, He will send 2 or 3 others to be His true presence. If I am stubborn and self-absorbed, not recognizing Jesus’ presence in my community, God will honor my God-given free will, and allow me to separate—separate all the way to Hell.

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”^{iv}

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ⁱ Graziano Marcheschi, MA, DMin with Nancy Seitz Marcheschi, Workbook for Lectors, Liturgy Training Publications, 2014, p.251

ⁱⁱ Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., The Gospel of Matthew, Sacra Pagina, The Liturgical Press, 1991, p.269

ⁱⁱⁱ Rev. Msgr. Willam Fitzgerald, 1-17-31 to 7-14-15

^{iv} *The Jesus Prayer*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_Prayer