

The Paper Pulpit

(Reflections from the Pastor)

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scriptural Reflection: *Matthew 18:15-20* "If your brother/sister sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother/sister. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

A pastor heard that one of his parishioners was announcing he would no longer attend church services. This rebellious parishioner was advancing the familiar argument that he could communicate with God just as easily out in the fields with nature as his setting for worship. One winter evening, the priest called on this reluctant member of his flock for a friendly visit. The two men sat before the fireplace making small talk, but studiously avoiding the issue of church attendance. After awhile, the priest took the tongs from the rack next to the fireplace and pulled a single coal from the fire. He placed the glowing ember on the hearth. As the two watched in silence, the coal quickly ceased burning and turned an ashen gray, while the other coals in the fire continued to burn brightly. The priest's silent message was not lost on the parishioner. After a long pause, he turned to the priest and said, "I'll be back to Mass next Sunday."

How many have heard the expression, "I'll do my thing and you do yours" OR "Don't express your values on me?" OR "What's right/wrong for you may not be for me?" Jesus speaks in today's gospel of coming clean with our friends by confronting them about their misdeeds and bringing them to straighten up. We should do this in private at first, Jesus says, but if our friend doesn't listen to us, we should bring two or more other friends from our same community. And yes, Jesus tells them they need to listen to the Church. In other words, if we see our brother or sister sinning, we need to do something about it.

Many people are dismayed that gentle Jesus speaks here with such force. Jesus sounds like a preacher, some think, trying to ram goodness down our throats. Unfortunately, we live in a "live and let live" age. Your business is your business, my business is my business, and we have an unspoken pact that you don't tell me what to do and I don't tell you what to do. But we have only to look at the example to see the tragic consequences when a friend doesn't keep a drunken friend from driving. The saying, "friends don't let friends drive drunk," is very apropos for today's gospel. Friends level with each other, even when this means pain and confrontation. Not only that, Jesus commands it.

Bible Studies: Our next Bible Study begins Tuesday, September 9th. We will look at and pray over the Gospel of St. Mark. St. Mark's Gospel will be read at Sunday Mass beginning in Advent, so what a great way to prepare.

Adoration and Benediction: Beginning September 9th, we will offer Adoration and Benediction every Tuesday evening from 5:00pm to 6:00pm. Mass will be offered at 6:00pm followed by a light supper and the St. Mark Bible Study.

Our intention to pray for at this week's holy hour is for young people as they go back to school, college and CCD. Know a young person who needs prayers? Why not come and pray for them from 5:00pm to 6:00pm this Tuesday?

I challenge every parishioner to come to at least one holy hour between now and the end of the year. Jesus asked his disciples if they could spend one hour with him in prayer. Can you?

Are you (or someone you know):

- An unconfirmed adult in the Catholic Church and wish to be confirmed?
- From another Christian denomination interested in joining the Catholic Church?
- Catholic but not confirmed and are getting married in the Catholic Church?
- Not Catholic and married to a Catholic, attending Mass with them and would like to receive Holy Communion?
- Not Catholic and planning on marrying a Catholic and would like to be Catholic.
- Not baptized and would like to be?
- Raised Catholic and would like to know your faith better.
- Fallen away from the Church, want to come back, and want a "refresher course."

We would love you to join us and know more about Jesus, the Bible and the Church. The RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation into Adulthood) begins this fall. Please contact Fr. Trempe as soon as possible to learn more about joining the Catholic Church and knowing more about our faith.

Birth of Mary: If December 8th is the Immaculate Conception (the conception of Mary), then what is September 8th? Since September 8th is 9 months from December, it must be the birth of Mary = Theotokos = God bearer. Let's all keep the mother of Jesus, and our mother, in a special place in our hearts this Thursday as we celebrate the birth of Mary.

God's blessings, Fr. Jim Trempe