

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily: Fr. Marco Park

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Brothers and sisters, every community can be beautiful when people come together with one heart. But whenever people gather, there can also be disagreements, misunderstandings, and tension. The Church is no exception.

Sometimes we imagine that parish life should always be peaceful: everyone agrees; everyone smiles; and everyone gets along. Then we have a parish meeting and suddenly, we discover that there can be very strong opinions about the music, the budget, the parish hall, and even the coffee! But that is part of being a community. We are not called to be a community where everyone agrees. We are called to be a community where we learn to love one another even when we disagree.

That is what Jesus teaches us in today's Gospel. Jesus says: "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone." Notice what Jesus says. He does not say: "Go and tell everyone else first." He says, go personally to the person: speak with them; listen to them; and try to understand what happened. But we know how difficult this can be.

When someone hurts us, sometimes the last person we want to talk to is the person who had hurt us. It is much easier to talk to a friend; and we often begin with those innocent words: "I don't want to complain, but..." or "I probably shouldn't say, but..." Then, somehow, five minutes later, our friend knows the whole story!

Jesus invites us to do something different: talk TO the person, rather than talk ABOUT the person. This is important in our families, too. Husbands and wives can misunderstand each other. Parents and children can see things very differently. Brothers and sisters can carry old hurts for many years. Sometimes, we stop talking because we do not know how to begin again. Jesus says: "Take the first step." Listen, speak honestly, and leave room for reconciliation.



The same is true in our parish. We come from different backgrounds and different generations. We have different personalities and different ideas. Some people are quiet; some are very organized; and some have very strong opinions! But we need one another, because the Church is not a gathering of perfect people. It is a gathering of people who are learning to love.

Just before today's Gospel, Jesus speaks about the lost sheep. The shepherd goes looking for the one sheep that has wandered away. That is the heart of Jesus; and that should be the heart of our parish. When someone is struggling, we do not simply say: "That's their problem." We reach out. When someone makes a mistake, we do not immediately write them off. We try to help. When someone feels forgotten, we make room for them because every person matters to God.

Of course, some relationships are difficult.

Sometimes we need healthy boundaries. Sometimes we need a little distance. But distance does not have to become rejection. We can still respect them; we can still pray for them; and we can still hope for a new beginning.

Then Jesus gives us this beautiful promise: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Jesus is present when we gather for Mass. But he is also present when we sit together and try to solve a difficult problem. He is present when we listen. He is present when we forgive. And sometimes, at a parish meeting, the most spiritual thing we can say is: "Maybe the other person has a point." That can be a very holy moment!

Saint Paul gives us the key in today's Second Reading: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another." He goes further to say: "Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law."

Brothers and sisters, there is someone in our life who may be difficult. It may be someone in our family, it may be someone at work, and it may even be someone here in our parish. We do not have to solve everything today, but we can take one small step. We can pray for that person. We can ask God to soften our own heart, and when the time is right, we can try to speak with them.

May our parish be a place where people feel welcomed rather than judged. May it be a place where people are listened to rather than talked about. May it be a place where love is stronger than our differences.

When we gather in Jesus' name, He is here among us. When Jesus is truly at the centre of our community, there is always hope for healing, reconciliation, and a new beginning.

And after all our parish meetings, I hope we can still sit down together and enjoy a cup of coffee! Amen.