



23rd Sunday Ord. Time Yr A

Lectio Divina

Lectio: Our text is part of Jesus' long journey to Jerusalem; to the Cross. He is either responding to the disciples' questions or to people who approach him. First of all (following Peter's misunderstanding – last Sunday's Gospel) he anticipates the disciples' need to have strong faith in him. So, he showed his divine nature to his close disciples, Peter James and John, in the Transfiguration. The disciples had a further question about Elijah who was expected to come before the Messiah. Jesus infers that this expectation came about in John the Baptist. Jesus, with his approaching Cross on his mind, connects John's innocent suffering and death to his impending Cross.

Next, when approached by a man with an epileptic young son, he cures the boy while referring to the need to have at least a little faith (Parable of the Mustard Seed¹). Again Jesus refers to his coming death and resurrection. In a confused attempt to test what Jesus sees as his duty, Peter is approached by the collectors of the Temple tax². Jesus' duty is to do the Father's will. So, he shows his divine connection by sending Peter to find a coin for the tax in a fish's mouth. Jesus has control even of fish. Jesus continues explaining about faith using a little child as an example. He concludes this, with the Parable of the Lost Sheep³ (Mt 18:12-14), showing how God goes out of his way for the little ones (1 out of 100) and the lost. As God is ready to forgive; so a disciple needs to be forgiving.

This is the context of our text. Note: verse 18 is reminiscent of the commitment given to Peter (Mt 16:19) and the words Jesus uses, after his resurrection, when he gives his apostles the power to forgive (Jn 20:23). Jesus is on the way to his Cross; but, he is still in charge.

Our text concludes with words that refer to the power of prayer when united through forgiveness i.e. when we gather in his Name⁴. Forgiveness is key to understanding Jesus' commitment to go to his Cross.

Read: **Matthew 18: 15 - 20**

Meditatio: Do I 'talk things out' when things go wrong in relationships? Do I listen to other people's different points of view? How do I react when people won't listen to me? Am I clear and open when presenting my point of view? How do I judge others? Are my judgements fair and after listening to, and coming to understand, the other person's situation/point of view? When have I sought the support of others in a dispute? Have I ever taken someone to court or vice versa – how did it work out? Do I sometimes hear but not listen? Do I put conditions on my offering of forgiveness? Considering the Lost Sheep Parable³, do I go out of my way to find the lost i.e. to help those who have done (me) wrong? Do I put people 'in boxes' i.e. treat them differently just because they have different beliefs (e.g. pagans) or because of their occupation (e.g. tax collectors)? Have I experienced how sinning has separated me from my (faith) community? Can I truly pray with those whom I have not forgiven – cf the reason for the Penitential Rite at Mass? Have I experienced the power of community prayer? Am I finding ways to pray with others during the Pandemic – Jesus will be there!?

Oratio: Pray for those who hurt others. Pray for the commitment to do good and avoid evil. Pray for innocent victims, especially of: violence, racial bigotry, or oppression. Pray for compassion and a true listening to each other. Pray for negotiators, for peacemakers and for intermediaries. Pray for those with closed minds. Pray for Judges and lawyers. Pray for those who do not know our loving God. Pray for tax collectors and for politicians who design our taxation laws. Pray that the laws of our society may reflect God's laws and provide for the common good of all. Pray that we will find ways to pray together in these times of Pandemic.

Contemplatio – Dwell in stillness, simply aware of the boundless expanse of mercy that surrounds you.

After your prayer — Find time to pray with those in your household at least praying Grace before Meals. If alone, ask God's blessing as you finish a phone call.

✠ Fr Joe

Matthew 18: 15 – 20

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 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.’

Notes:

1/ Matthew has earlier related The Mustard Seed Parable Mt 13:31-32; it is also found at Mk 4:31-32 and Lk 13:18-19 and 17:6.

2/ Jesus takes up the issue of Tax again when the Pharisees try to trip him up at Mt 22:15-22.

3/ Luke has a more expansive telling of the Lost Sheep Parable at 15:4-7.

4/ The translation below makes this fact clearer.

Another translation of Vs 19:

“In like manner, I say to you: if on earth two of you are united in asking for anything, it will be done for them by my heavenly Father

(Christian Community Bible)