

CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES
Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation



September 7, 2008 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle A)
(Monday, September 8 8:00PM Mass of Our Lady of Charity)

Gospel reading 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 in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

***A fellow disciple. **The local congregation.**

Brief commentary:

In this text, Matthew explains how to settle conflicts in the communal life of the believers. Today many Christians have a romantic notion of what the early communities were like. This reading shows that even in the early years there were disagreements and conflict among the believers. The gospel explains the process to be followed with the sinner: 1) private correction; 2) before two or three witnesses; 3) before the assembly. If these steps fail to "gain a brother or a sister" and the sinner arrogantly refuses to repent, then he or she should be set outside the fellowship of the church. Because the Matthean community was composed primarily of Jewish Christians, they were familiar with the Jewish custom of avoiding the company of Gentiles and tax collectors.

The second part of the reading encourages communal prayer by assuring us that when we gather in his name Jesus is present among us and that his presence guarantees the efficacy of our prayer.

Today's reading offers three significant messages:

- The first step in the process of reconciliation is a conversation between two people.
- This text provides the foundation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- The power given to the community to exclude unrepented members is seen as a last resort.

For our shared or personal reflection:

After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.

1. How do I feel about conflict? Do I usually follow the steps outlined in the Gospel or is "gossip" my initial behavior?
2. How do I experience the presence of Jesus when my parish comes together in prayer?

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 553; 1088; 1373; 1444, 1829.