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Wednesday's Gospel: Fraternal Correction

Gospel for Wednesday in the
19th Week of Ordinary Time,
and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 18:15-20*)

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 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. Truly, 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 I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

Commentary

The Christian practice of fraternal correction has its roots in the Gospel. It is a key means to achieve holiness and to avoid straying from the path. In this passage, Jesus instructs the disciples on how they should practice it among themselves, doing so in private and with charity.

Everyone find it difficult to recognize their own faults. The value of fraternal correction was also recognized by classical pagan authors such as Seneca (cf. *De Ira*, 3, 36, 4). Saint Ambrose testified to this practice among Christians when he wrote in the 4th century: “If you discover a defect in your friend, correct him secretly. Corrections do good and are more useful than remaining silent when with a friend” (*De Officiis Ministerum* II, 125-135).

This Gospel passage makes clear first of all that fraternal correction is something good. But an attitude of humility and the willingness to accept correction is essential. Only when someone is willing to accept fraternal correction and amend their own life, will they know when and how it is appropriate to offer fraternal correction to someone else.

Before making a correction, it is advisable to pray for that person. Then, once our own intention has been purified, it is prudent to consult another person who is in a position to judge whether the correction is appropriate or not.

And thus, with these safeguards, we are fulfilling in a very practical way the command to love our neighbor as ourselves, which is the commandment that sums up all the others. We need to care for ourselves in order to be able to care for others.

True affection is the key for fraternal correction to be effective. When we truly care about another person, fraternal correction will be well received because the person will realize that we are acting out of charity, and therefore will find it easier to accept it. Hence the importance of living fraternity well

in all its aspects, and not only when correcting others.

We also need to forgive any offense before correcting someone. Right after this passage, Peter asks Jesus how many times he must forgive his brother when he sins against him. Up to seven? And Jesus answers: no, up to seventy times seven. Where true charity and affection exists, fraternal corrections will come about naturally, fostering a true atmosphere of forgiveness.

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