

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time



We are likely here because, at some point, we asked ourselves some form of the question, "What can I do for a loved one who has gotten off track?" We may hide it for a while, protect it at times, deny how bad it has gotten, and thought we could take care of it ourselves. The Christian lifestyle, rooted in fellowship since its beginning, can provide us with tools to follow in the path that suggested by Jesus.

Seemingly in direct response to the question mentioned above, Jesus shares an outline for how we can offer fraternal correction if another has fallen to sinful habits and addictive behaviors. Before this, Christ shares how far God is willing to go in pursuit of each of us and our loved ones (Mt. 18:12-14):

If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost.

God never stops pursuing us. He does, however, give us an outline for how we might maneuver through the difficult circumstances we are familiar with:

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

Jesus mentions four steps to take:

1. Speak directly to the person
2. Gather a couple of trusted people to affirm your loving concern
3. Bring your concerns to a community of believers, asking for prayer and support
4. Treat them with love and mercy, but establish boundaries

Each of our situations will require variations to this, but hearing Jesus speak on the issue offers comfort, forgiveness, and His presence. We can discern these words as we reflect on a variety of relationships in our lives.

The greatest defense against reverting back to our own old tendencies is reaching our hands out to those new to this type of fellowship. As we do this, we enter into relationships where we receive just as much as we give of ourselves.

Similarly, we enter the Church in need of salvation and take refuge in a common vessel. Our solution is found in the grace offered by Jesus Christ. We engage him through the Word, the sacraments of the Church, and when we reach our hand out to fellow brothers and sisters. We gather today in the midst of God, who grants us the gift of faith and willingness to be here.

Yearning for God's mercy, let us continue to use our experience to grow with each other, love and pray for our addict, and accompany those struggling on the margins. At the same time, we ought to be humble and willing enough to recognize that God is the only one capable of salvation, and that He is relentless.

- Can you recall an experience of being the one lost sheep who God went off to find?
- What benefits have you experienced as a result of supporting others in recovery?
- What lessons do you take away from Jesus's remarks about fraternal correction?

What About the Kids? Premier!

Join us Tuesday, September 8 to view the premier of the new film 'What About the Kids?'

- Tuesday, September 8, 2020 at 9:00 PM ET/6:00 PM PT
- View addiction through the lens of an 8-year-old Catholic girl whose parents are addicted to opioids
- Virtual premier will feature a screening of the film and conversation with the director/writer about his personal connections with addiction
- For more information visit: whataboutthekidsfilm.com

Sunday Mass Readings this Week

1st Reading: Ezekiel 33:7-9

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

2nd Reading: Romans 13:8-10

Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20