

23rd. Sunday in Ordinary Time

On this Father's Day weekend, I am beginning the fiftieth year of my priesthood. At least some of our ordination class have gathered every year to celebrate the anniversary of our ordination. There will only be a few of us who can gather this year. It is a time when we thank God that God has called us to this ministry. It is a time when we thank God for the people who have supported us and worked alongside of us making the kingdom present. It is a time when I remember more clearly that I cannot be a priest on my own. I need to be part of a community that gathers with me to celebrate the Eucharist.

We are here this evening/morning celebrating who we are as God's people. We are here recommitting ourselves to the call God made to us at our Baptism to live as fully as we can, the life that Jesus shared with us then. None of us can live that life by ourselves. We need the love and support of each other to be able to do that.

But living as a community is never easy. Living together as the Church of God has been difficult right from the beginning. Today's gospel addresses the fact that we are an imperfect community: that we are a community that sins; that we are people who hurt each other. Today's gospel offers us an ordered way to deal

with those in the community who do things wrong. "If your brother or sister does something wrong, go and have it out with them alone, between your two selves. If they listen to you, you have won them back." It is for love of the other member of the community that we quietly let them know how they have wronged, and then call them back to a better way of living. We do it privately to save them embarrassment. It is only when that is unsuccessful that we involve others. It is a last resort that we might exclude them from the community for a while.

What Jesus is saying here applies more easily to a small, closely knit Christian Community. It is very hard to apply that to parishes of today. But the principles are the same. We are not given permission to judge each other, but we are urged to care enough about each other that we might take whatever means are possible to preserve the unity of the community. If we are not one with God, we cannot be one with each other.

Everything that we do wrong, every act of selfishness, has an effect upon others, just as every act of love builds up the community of the Church. We are called to be a people for whom reconciliation is a priority. Jesus reaches out to embrace and forgive others through each one of us.

Those words of Jesus, “Whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven” should not be applied only to the sacrament of Reconciliation. Yes, Jesus works powerfully through that sacrament to gift us with his forgiveness. But Reconciliation is a Sacrament of the Church. When I speak the words of absolution, I speak those words in the name of Jesus and in your name too. The Sacrament of Reconciliation celebrates what is meant to be happening every day, wherever the Church is, wherever you and I are.

How often do we deny others the forgiveness that Jesus is longing to offer to them? How often do we refuse to accept the forgiveness that Jesus is offering to us because we refuse to accept the forgiveness of others?

The power of the community of the church is emphasised again when Jesus talks about prayer. “If two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my father in heaven.” That is an extraordinary statement isn’t it? If even two of us are of one mind in our prayer, God cannot refuse us. What does that say about community prayer? Jesus goes on to say, “For where two or more meet in my name, I shall be in their midst.”

If we were looking for an argument to support our gathering together on a Sunday, surely this is a very powerful one. But when we can celebrate the reconciling love of Jesus in the gift of the Eucharist, then how can we stay away?

Whenever we celebrate the Eucharist we remember how connected we are to one another. The Prayers of the Faithful often express this best. We are connected to all the Fathers in our community this weekend as we thank God for the way that our God lives and loves through them. Whenever a child is brought here to be baptised, we remember that that child is baptised into our family. We rejoice with those who celebrate their wedding anniversaries. We pray together for those who have died and mourn with their loved ones. Our bulletin helps us to remember the anniversaries of those who died. We have the names there also of some of the sick who have asked our prayers.

To have been called by Baptism into his Church is pure gift, and something for which we can give thanks each day. We pray today that we may be that reconciling, forgiving church that makes Jesus present wherever we are.