



GOSPEL GOSSIP

Jesus said, Where two or three are gathered
in my name, I am there among them.

St Matthew 18. 15-20

Sunday 10 September

This week's gospel reading has two contrasting aspects: disagreement and agreement. It begins with Jesus telling his disciples how to deal with disputes. To begin with, within the church family, point out another's faults with just the two of you present, and then if that doesn't resolve matters, and the person restored to good standing, then try again with more present. If this person still refuses to acknowledge their wrongdoing, then they're lost.

And on the other hand, Jesus assures his followers that if they are gathered together in his name and truly agree on what to ask, then it will be done by our Father in heaven, with the assurance that he, Jesus, will be amongst them.

- What do you do when someone who should know better wrongs you?
- How far are you prepared to go in order to be reconciled?
- Is peace better at any cost?
- Would you assume that you're in the right?
- Is your prosecution of the guilty more to do with upholding your opinion rather than their reconciliation?

'Whenever two or three...' A phrase which is quite common in church circles. However, the qualification that Jesus gives in order that the Father will grant the requests is that they should be in agreement. This may sound a simple matter, but stop and think: how often when two or three are gathered together is their true and absolute agreement? There may be no dissent, but that is not the same as agreement, in the same way that the absence of fighting means there's peace.

Jesus softens this by adding that he will be there in their midst. He is not acting as a referee or a pacifier, but as one who will help and guide us in our requests, bringing us to agreement. Through his Holy Spirit, who prompts us all to intercede, to ask on behalf of, he is present today as we pray. The Holy Spirit guides, inspires and above all unites. When two or three are gathered together, then God is surely with them. That is one of the many reasons that you cannot be a Christian in isolation, on your own – you need other Christians around you.

- Are you ever aware of Jesus' presence when praying or worshipping with others?
- What does that add to the quality or purpose of your prayer?
- Is Jesus not present with an individual?
- How can you agree?
- Do you believe that God will answer prayer?

What this passage raises in our minds is the need to pray, what to pray for, how to pray, and when to pray. Here, Jesus does not give us the answers to all the questions which his comments provoke, but it serves to get us thinking about how faith is more efficacious when it is practised together. That is not to say that there isn't any place for private prayer and meditation – far from it – but rather the prayer of the community informs and enriches the prayer of the individual.