

Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost, Proper 18

September 6, 2020

Year A RCL

Ezekiel 33:7-11; Psalm 119:33-40; Matthew 18:15-20

“Where two or three are gathered in my Name, I am there among them.”

By: The Rev. Fr. Fabian Villalobos

According with St. Teresa of Avila, the relationship we have in community with our brothers and sisters is an indication of the relationship with have with God. She said this because there is a connection in the way how we treat others and how we relate with God. Teresa of Avila follows the Christian tradition that has interpreted the practical advice from the first letter of John that understands the love of God with the love of others.

“Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.” 1 John 4:20

The spiritual life of Jesus disciples is incarnated and grounded in community whether it is our own family, the neighborhood, work, school or the church. Christian life is always lived in relationship with others. It is impossible to be Christians without denying and dying to oneself to produce fruits in others. We carry our cross while we are loving and caring for others.

Is in our community life that we face the biggest challenges of spiritual life. In the relationship with others, we encounter sometimes conflict, disagreement and struggles. It is also in community where we experience the most powerful presence of God in the Holy Spirit. The narratives of Jesus' resurrection happened when the community of the disciples were together.

Life in community is so important that Jesus in today's gospel mentions how if two agree in prayer to ask for something, "*it will be done for you by my Father in heaven*" or that when two or three are together, Jesus is in the midst of them. The community is indispensable then to experience Jesus presence and to receive what we need.

We normally do not understand the power of togetherness for our selfish human nature. Jesus instead, by the Trinitarian Relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit knows in first person, how when we are in communion with others, our love becomes complete. This process of being with others don't exclude conflict or divergences that threaten and destroy unity in the community even of the church.

For this reason, in today's gospel Jesus mentions and advises how to persevere in our community life and resolve the offenses we received from the sin of others. One of the main conclusions is that the community goes before the

single person, often the sinful member of the community wants to invert this order, putting his/her own desires or needs first before the whole community. It is painful to see people who leave their church and break away from the communion of others when they are confronted by their personal sin and refuse to change.

“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone.”

The sin of one is like our own sin which brings ramifications to the life of others. The community of the disciples is far from being the perfect community, like our own church or any church for that fact, of the humanity brings a sinful nature that is impossible to be denied or controlled all the time. Jesus knew this, and advises us to confront the person who is committing the sin, first alone to point out the fault and appeal to the principles of good relationship to regain the trust and love for that person and specially to bring them to the presence of God.

Something that deserves our attention as we talked about human relationships in this gospel is that it mentions four times the verb “listens” in verses 15-17. It seems that our relationship with others is determined and conditioned by our ability to listen to others. This is very significative since our spiritual life and

growth as Christians also depends on our ability to listen to God. Here we see the relationship that Teresa of Avila and the Christian tradition have made between our relationship with others and the life of communion with God.

If the sinful member refuses to listen, two or three witnesses are called to validate and give testimony of the situation. The importance of calling others is to show how an isolated situation brings repercussions and consequences for the life of the whole community, the sinful behavior of one affect all. If the person continues closed in the heart and rejects the fraternal correction and the invitation to change, even in the presence of witnesses, then the entire community of believers is informed and asked to consider that person like a non-believer.

Then, Jesus reminds of the authority that the church as whole community has in biding or loosing those situations that resist or welcome change. The unresolved conflict will bring dire repercussions as it represents always dissension and division contrary to the communion and community life Jesus expects from his followers. There is a link between carrying one's cross and giving up personal sin, each time people refuse to be responsible and assume the Christian duty of putting God first, we will find unhappy and immature people who search and look for sinful conflict.

As believers being and living in community, we always have an opportunity to care, love and be vulnerable about our own sins knowing that it is “in and through” others that God guarantees His presence in our lives. Amen.