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## Leading a Brother to Repentance

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“If your brother sins, 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 charge may be established 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 (Matt 18:15-18)

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He is a nice man, a Catholic. Neighbours like him. Drinking is his only problem. It makes the life of his family miserable. The wife asks for prayers for him, but she tells their relatives, friends, and neighbours not to talk with him about the possibility of giving it up. “It only makes things worse”, she says.

### Dealing with a sinful brother

When a tax-collector becomes a brother, the heavens rejoice and the whole church praises God for His amazing grace of salvation. However, when a brother becomes a tax-collector there is not much to celebrate. Today’s Gospel is aware of such a possibility and comes out with a procedure to minimise the negative

impact of such a situation on the entire community: “When your brother sins, go and tell him his fault” (Matt 18:15).

The process outlined in the Gospel has three stages: (1) the first stage is a private conversation; (2) the second stage is a conversation in the presence of two or three witnesses; (3) the third stage is before a local community. The aim of the process is to bring a brother to repentance. Treating him as “a Gentile and a tax collector” means that he has become an outsider.

The best example of such situation is the story of a brother from the church in Corinth during the time of Paul. He lived with his stepmother. Paul writes to the community: “you are to deliver this man to Satan

for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor 5:5). Such severe punishment was meant to be a shock therapy. That brother needed to realise that as a Christian, he had to live by different standards, that certain things are not permitted to those who carry the name of Christ. To protect the community from bad influence, Paul writes: “But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one” (1 Cor 5:11).

The doors, however, are not closed. If such a brother is willing to repent from his sinful way of life, he is always welcome to the community. “But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die” (Ez 18:21).

### **Go and Tell**

Today’s Gospel presents a huge challenge for many contemporary Christians and churches. We do not like to “go and tell” a brother about his sinful behaviour. “Mind your own business“ is our motto. Not even the words of God can make us change our attitude: “If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul” (Ez 33:8-9). We do not consider ourselves prophets and we do not think it is our responsibility to warn the wicked. Today, even parents and teachers dare not to correct their children because, by the prevailing standards, such corrections are seen as curtailing their spontaneity and freedom.

The outcome is a sorry state of our churches and a sorry state of our societies. We have thieves, who pray to the Virgin, for success in their stealing, gay

bishops, who get married with their male partners, defenders of abortion, governments selling arms that are used to destroy lives of innocent people, and greedy companies that treat their workers worse than slaves. We do not have any more leaders like St. Paul, to tell us straight in the face: “Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:9-10).

Christianity is about transformation, about new life, about the power of God that makes something totally new in the lives of those who turn to Him. Idolaters believe in one God, adulterers become faithful spouses, gays stop practicing homosexuality, thieves work with their hands, the greedy learn to share, and so on. If we believe that after becoming Christians we can live according to worldly standards, then we have never experienced the transforming power of our faith. “Go and tell” your brother is a reminder that as Christians we are responsible for each other and for the health of our communities.

### **Conclusion**

During the US presidential campaign, a certain Catholic politician, openly placed himself in the pro-abortion camp. The bishops warned him and other politicians, who joined him, that if they persist in their choice they are risking the penalty of excommunication and should not approach the altar to receive the holy communion. Harsh? Maybe. Yet, that what responsible love is all about.

The Church is not above the word of God and She cannot interpret the Word to suit the trends of the world. She has to be faithful to the Word. As people of God, we are all accountable before God and people for the way we live our Christian calling. We should never forget the power of the yeast. The yeast of the Kingdom of God can transform the world (Matt 13:33), but the yeast of sin can destroy an entire community (1 Cor 5:6-7).

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### **Quote of the Week**

"Be kind to every person you meet. For every person is fighting a great battle." St. Ephraim

### Prayer Intentions

- The people in Europe are afraid of a new war that might come out of the conflict in Ukraine; let us keep praying for peace in the world;
- Let us pray for the leaders of the Church; may God bless them with wisdom and courage;
- Let us pray for the unity of Christians; let us come together and build a better world;
- Let us pray for Anna; may the Lord heal her from her sickness and give her new life and energy;
- Let us pray for all the good people we meet in life; may God bless them and protect them from all evil;
- Let us pray for all who travel; may they, by the grace of God, safely reach their destinations;

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### Biblical Passages we all love

- “I, I am he who comforts you; who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, of the son of man who is made like grass, and have forgotten the Lord, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, and you fear continually all the day because of the wrath of the oppressor, when he sets himself to destroy? And where is the wrath of the oppressor (Is 51:12-13)
- “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. (Is 55:1-3)
- “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Is 55:6-9)

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### Peace We Need

“The true and solid peace of nations consists not in equality of arms, but in mutual trust alone”. (St. John XXIII)

“If you want peace work for justice” (Pope Paul VI).

“Do not be afraid to take a chance on peace, to teach peace, to live peace...Peace will be the last word of history”. (St. John Paul II)

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**May God bless all who remember us in prayer and support our ministry.**

New Life Asia Team