

IF HE LISTENS TO YOU HAVE GAINED YOUR BROTHER – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Mt 18.15-20

"If your brother sins against you, 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. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

After having talked of the scandal of the community towards the frail ones, the disadvantaged, that can be offended by what they see on the inside of the community in terms of ambition and superiority, Jesus now begins to talk of the scandal of the disagreements within the community. It is what Matthew writes at chapter 18,15-20.

"«*If your brother..*»", therefore it is someone in the community, "*«..sins against you go and, ...*»", do not reprimand him, as is the usual way, but "*«tell him his fault, »*". It is not the position of a superior towards an inferior to reprimand him, but the position of a brother that tries to make up the unity, tries to overcome the disagreement. Always remembering what Jesus has already warned, namely, that before you look at the speck in his brother's eye, one needs to be careful that there is not a speck in one's own eye (a speck that deforms reality)

"«*...between you and him alone. »*", therefore the argument must not be public, the problem must be resolved. And it is the offended person that must go to the offender, because who has made the mistake, who offends often does not have the courage, nor the strength to say sorry, to ask to be pardoned. So it must be the wronged party, the offended person, to go to the offender and settle the argument.

"*If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you,.. »*"; they are those in the community that carry out the role of peace makers, "*«.. that*

every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses»". According to the Book of Deuteronomy, at chapter 19,15 on the validity of a testimony.

«If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. »". The Greek term is "ecclesia" that represents the community of people summoned, the assembly of those summoned by Jesus *« And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you... »*", not for the community, but for you, *«...as a Gentile and a tax collector »*". What does this mean? It does not mean that this individual, the cause of the quarrel, is excluded from the love of the community, and neither from your love, but it means that this love will be one way.

While in the community the love given is also received, because bothers should exchange this love towards the person who is the cause of the conflict, such a love should be given to the enemy. Jesus tells us to love our enemies, say a prayer for the persecutors. So it does not mean to exclude that person from your love, but love him at a loss, one way.

And still speaking of the theme of forgiveness, Jesus insures us: *«Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,.. »*". It is always forgiveness, forgive those who ties the forgiveness of God *«...and whatever you loose on earth shall be loose] in heaven»*". It concerns forgiveness. The forgiveness of God becomes operative and effective when it is translated in forgiveness towards others. Therefore who does not forgive binds God's forgiveness, while who forgives unbinds it.

At the end of the chapter, verse 35 Jesus will in fact say: *«And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you, unless you each forgive your brother from your hearts.»* Therefore the affirmation of Jesus does not concern the permission of His community of power in every material and in every field, but for the responsibility in the giving of forgiveness: if you do not forgive, God's forgiveness is bound.

And then Jesus concludes: *« Again I say to you, if two of you agree...»*", The Greek verb used for 'to agree' is 'sinfoneo', from which comes the word 'symphony.' It is important because it indicates the life in the community. Symphony means that different voices, different instruments play together each one giving of their best. There is no need to have a uniformity of voices and sounds, but there is a variety in the only score which is love. Therefore it is love lived in its various forms, flowering in various modes.

«...about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three...»", here returns the two or three that have been proponents for peace, making manifest the Lord's presence. *«... are gathered in my name, there am I among them. »*".

And here again the theme dear to the evangelist, that of Jesus, God with us. While in the Jewish tradition it is said that where two or three are gathered to study the Torah, the laws, the 'Shekina', the glory of God is among them, Jesus replaces the law. The adherence to God does not come through the laws external to mankind, but with the identification of the person: Jesus, Son of God, the model for humanity. Jesus assures that when there is this unity, when the disagreements have recomposed themselves inside the community His presence is uninterrupted and growing.