

## Jesus and the Authority of the Church (23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

### **Ezekiel 33:7-9—The Obligation to Fraternal Correction**

1. Silence: if you fail in fraternal correction, then you shall be responsible
2. Speaking: if you correct, he will be responsible; you will “save” your life

### **Psalm 95—If Today You Hear His Voice, Harden Not Your Hearts**

1. “Harden not your hearts, as at Meribah” (95:7-8)

### **Romans 13:8-10—You Shall Love Your Neighbor as Yourself**

1. “He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law” (Rom 13:8; cf. Lev 19:18)

### **Matthew 18:15-20—If Your Brother Sins against You**

1. Fraternal Correction: 3-Step Process for Church Discipline
  - a. Step 1: Individual Correction (“between you and him alone”)
  - b. Step 2: Group Correction (“one or two others”)
  - c. Step 3: Ecclesial Correction (“tell it to the *ekklēsia*”)
2. Excommunication:
  - a. “Gentile and tax collector” (cf. 1 Cor 5:9-13; 2 Cor 6:14-15)
  - b. Legal: “Evidence” of “two or three witnesses” (cf. Deut 19:15)
  - c. Cut off from ecclesial community
  - d. Subject of further evangelization
  - e. Power to “bind” and “loose” on “earth” and in “heaven”
  - f. Peter’s primacy (Matt 16:18) vs. Apostolic Authority (Matt 18:17)
3. Power of Apostolic Prayer:
  - a. “If two of you [apostles] agree on earth about anything....”
  - b. “It will be done for them by my Father in heaven....”
4. Presence of Jesus amongst the Apostles:
  - a. Where “two or three are gathered *in my name*”
  - b. “There I am in the midst of them.”

### **The Catechism on the Apostolic Power to “Bind” and “Loose”**

1. The Meaning of “Bind” and “Loose” (CCC 553)
  - a. Sacramental Reconciliation: authority to “absolve sins”
  - b. Doctrine: to proclaim “doctrinal judgments”
  - c. Discipline: to “make disciplinary decisions” in the Church
2. Jesus entrusted this authority to “the apostles” (CCC 553)
3. Jesus gives the Church the power of “excommunication” (CCC 1463)
  - a. Impedes the “reception of the sacraments”
  - b. The “exercise of certain ecclesiastical acts”

The words *bind and loose* mean: whomever you exclude from your communion, will be excluded from communion with God; whomever you receive anew into your communion, God will welcome back into his. *Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God.* (CCC 1445)

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection (23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. Do you find Ezekiel’s admonition to correct your neighbor challenging? Can you think of any times where you have failed to correct someone who needed guidance? Can you think of any times where you successfully helped someone turn from sinful or self-destructive activity? How can we follow Ezekiel’s teaching in our daily life?

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2. What do you think of Jesus’ three-step process of fraternal correction and church discipline? Can you think of any ways in which we fail to follow Jesus’ directions?

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3. How does Jesus’ teaching lay the foundation for the Church discipline of excommunication? If Jesus envisions a person being cut off from “the Church,” how many churches does Jesus’ teaching presuppose? If there are thousands of denominations, how is it possible to put Jesus’ teaching into practice if the excommunicated person can simply ‘switch denominations’?

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### For Further Study

1. CCC 553, 1445, 1463: Jesus gave the apostles the authority to forgive sins, to proclaim doctrine, and to enact church discipline.
2. Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri. *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 230-33. Excellent discussion of this section in Matthew’s Gospel.