

## Closing Prayer

Confirm, O God, in unity and truth  
the Church you gather in Christ.  
Encourage the fervent,  
enlighten the doubtful,  
and bring back the wayward.

Bind us together in mutual love,  
that our prayer in Christ's name  
may be pleasing to you.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever.

*Opening prayers, Ordinary Time 23, Year A<sup>2</sup>*

CPL • LBC Year A Proper 18.odt • 2020-07-01

<sup>2</sup> *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*

## Proper 18

*(Sunday between 4 and 10 September inclusive)*

### Principal Service readings

Ezekiel 33.7-11	The watchman is to warn and exhort repentance
Psalms 119.33-40	Commitment to God's commandments
Romans 13.8-14	Love your neighbour; live decently, in the light
Matthew 18.15-20	Brotherly correction; prayer in common

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *Settling differences*

<sup>15</sup>If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. <sup>16</sup>But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup>If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector. <sup>18</sup>Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup>Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup>For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

Matthew 18.15-20 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

### Comments and Questions

At the beginning of chapter 18 Jesus asks the question, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' (18.1). This introduces some teaching about the church community, including a section on conflict

<sup>1</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

resolution, which we have in today's section. Conflict resolution is a hot topic in management manuals, business leadership books, and of course in family relations. We might see ourselves as approaching an issue with good intentions, but, since we are human beings, conflict naturally arises, because people have different perspectives on issues. Even in the church, sadly, this is the case, and so Matthew gives us in chapter 18 a conflict resolution process. Generally, he is reflecting the rule of subsidiarity, that is, to deal with the problem at the lowest or closest possible level, as opposed to bringing it to a central authority. In modern terms, he is asking for conflicts to be sorted out at parish level rather than taking them to the archdeacon or bishop.

It should be noted that Matthew is talking about conflicts within the church fellowship, not conflicts with outsiders. Jesus talks at first about noticing that someone has done wrong, or sinned. Every disciple is empowered to approach their fellow Christian to point out the problem privately. If the point is accepted then all well and good, as in a family setting, the model for the church (see Matthew 12.46-50).

Only if the one-to-one correction doesn't work is the issue to be taken to the next stage, as in the Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 19.15). If this fails, too, then the matter comes to the 'Church' in general. Significantly, only here and in Matthew 16.18 does Matthew use the term 'church' (*ekklesia*). Interestingly, there is no reference to a particular church leader, like a bishop, but to the 'community' or 'church' in general. Matthew envisages the Church acting collectively and punishing a sinner by treating him or her like 'a pagan or tax collector'. That is to say, the sinner is to be excommunicated or cast outside the community. The advice might sound odd to us, but it is in keeping with the Jewish roots of Matthew's community. St Paul gives similar advice (1 Corinthians 5.1-8).

## Quotations

### 1

Unity despite diversity is exactly what defines Christianity as distinct from and antithetical to all other religious belief systems.

*Apologia: a collection of Christian essays* / R. Alan Woods. 2006

### 2

On the concept of unity – That's right – Jesus' most pressing concern before leaving the earth was our unity. He was looking ahead, to every generation of believer. And as he prayed, he made it clear that our witness as his body in this fractured, messed-up, chaotic world would depend on our love for another.

*A simpler faith: hope for those who struggle with church* / Ed Galisewski. 2012

### 3

I too share the healthy impatience of those who sometimes think that we can and should do more. Yet we should not be lacking in faith and gratitude: many steps have been taken in these decades to heal the wounds of centuries and millennia. Mutual knowledge and esteem have grown and helped to overcome deeply rooted prejudices. Theological dialogue and the dialogue of charity have developed, as well as various forms of co-operation in the dialogue of life, at both the pastoral and cultural level.

Letter from Pope Francis to Cardinal Kurt Koch on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St John Paul II's encyclical letter *Ut unum sint*. 2020

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Reconciliation; conflict resolution; non-violence; forgiveness; discipleship; sacrament of reconciliation; prophecy; ethical imperatives of the gospel; foundations of morality