

I hope parishioners still have and are still using their copies of 'Matthew's Gospel' that we gave out at the beginning of this Liturgical Year. If your copy has been neglected for a while then perhaps now is a good opportunity to pick it up again and catch up on where we have now got to (Chapter 18).

All the four gospels faithfully hand on what Jesus did and taught, but each of the evangelists arranges the material in a slightly different way with an eye to the situation of the particular communities for which their gospels were originally written. For example Matthew who was writing for a community of Christians from a predominantly Jewish background structures his gospel around five discourses of Jesus following the structure of the five books of Moses that make up the Torah. So now we find ourselves listening to part of the fourth of these discourses, the 'community discourse', in which Jesus is teaching his disciples what their common life is to be like once he is no longer physically with them.

The first thing to note is that Jesus does promise to be with them 'where two or three meet in my name' (Matthew 18:20). This must have been very comforting for the disciples to hear and hopefully we too hear it as good news. Jesus also teaches them how they are to resolve any differences among themselves, firstly by trying to resolve them directly and privately with the person concerned, and only if that fails involving other people. This can be a challenge as it is often easier to complain to others rather than addressing the person concerned directly in such a manner that will show our desire to 'win back our brother'.

In the Second Reading Saint Paul writes to the Christian community in Rome in a similar vein when he says 'avoid getting into debt, except the debt of mutual love' (Romans 13:8).

We could spend some time this week reflecting on our own experience of Christian community, whether it be our parish or elsewhere. Have we felt that sense of 'mutual love'? When we have gathered together have we recognised the presence of Jesus with and among us? If we have then it is good to acknowledge this and give thanks for it. If our experience has been otherwise then again it is valuable to recognise this and ask ourselves if there is anything we can do to make a difference.

The other piece of Scripture I would like to draw attention to today is the responsorial psalm, Psalm 94 'O that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your hearts'. In the full version of the Prayer of the Church this is usually the first psalm of the day. It is therefore a daily reminder to listen to the word of God and not to allow our hearts to be hardened in any way. 'Hardness of heart' can be a natural response to disappointment in community life, but as the psalm warns us we must guard against it, not least because it prevents us from entering into that debt of mutual love of which I spoke earlier.

Key to 'mutual love' and an 'unhardening of our hearts' is forgiveness. In next week's Gospel reading Jesus answers the question, 'how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me?'. If you can't wait until next week you could always just read ahead in Matthew Chapter 18. However I suspect most of us will not even need to do that as we already know the answer. The difficult bit is being able to put it into practice.

For video version see: <https://youtu.be/ELnE4DLzFJY>