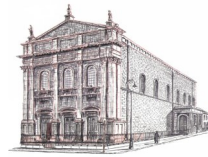




**PARISH OF ST. AGATHA**  
**5TH/6TH SEPTEMBER 2020**



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**POPE SAYS: GOSSIP IS A PLAGUE MORE AWFUL THAN COVID-19**

Pope Francis explores Jesus' invitation to admonish members of the community who have sinned, and says fraternal correction builds up the Church while gossip tears it down. He reflected on the day's Gospel (Mt 18:15-20), in which Jesus speaks about fraternal correction. The Pope said the episode invites us to consider two dimensions of the Christian life: the communitarian, "which demands *safeguarding communion*" and the personal, "which obliges attention and *respect for every individual conscience*." The Holy Father said that Jesus, offers a three-step approach to correcting our brother or sister who has sinned.

**STEP 1: DISCRETELY ADMONISH**

First, we are invited to discretely admonish that person, "not to judge him but to help him realise what he has done." Pope Francis admitted that it is not easy to take this first step. "There is the fear that the brother may react badly; at times you may lack sufficient confidence with him.... And other reasons."

**STEP 2: GET HELP**

Afterwards, if the person has not repented, Jesus urges us to seek out the help of other sisters and brothers. Pope Francis said this second step differs from a precept in the Law of Moses, which required the presence of two or three witnesses in order to condemn someone. "The two witnesses are called not to accuse and judge, but to help," said the Pope.

**STEP 3: TELL THE CHURCH**

The third step to be taken if someone persists in their error, is to bring the matter to the Church community. "There are things that can have an impact on other brothers and sisters: it takes a greater love to rehabilitate the brother."

**LAST-DITCH MEASURE**

However, noted the Pope, sometimes even this communitarian intervention fails. In this case, Jesus says the person should be treated "as you would a Gentile or a tax collector." Pope Francis noted that this expression could be seen as pejorative [defamatory]. In reality, he said, this drastic measure "invites us to put the brother in God's hands: only the Father will be able to show a greater love than that of all brothers and sisters put together." The Pope pointed out that Jesus welcomed Gentiles and tax collectors, causing scandal to the "conformists" of His time.

**GOSSIP HURTS THE COMMUNITY**

The Pope went on to consider what happens when we choose to gossip about a member of the community, rather than follow the path of fraternal correction. "When we see a brother or sister make a mistake or with a defect," said Pope Francis, "the first thing we do is go tell others about it. We gossip." Gossip, he added, closes a person's heart to the community and hurts the Church's unity, since the devil is the great gossip who seeks to sow discord. "Please, brothers and sisters, let us make an effort not to gossip," added the Pope. "Chatter is a plague more awful than Covid!"

**HEALTHY USE OF FRATERNAL CORRECTION**

In conclusion, Pope Francis prayed that the Blessed Virgin Mary might help us make fraternal correction "a healthy practice, so that in our communities ever new fraternal relationships, founded on mutual forgiveness and above all on the invincible power of God's mercy, may be instilled." (Vatican News/Devin Watkins).

**BROTHERLY AND SISTERLY CORRECTION IN THE NAME OF GOD**

In today's Gospel (Matt 18:15-20), Jesus reminds us that to belong to the Church, is to belong to a Community of brothers and sisters. We are all Members of the One Body and have a responsibility to care for each others soul. This means that being a Christian is not a private affair, but a community affair. That is why a Christian is called to be a spiritual *Sentry*, to watch-out and warn our neighbour, when we see the devil robbing them of eternal life. If we choose to keep silent, then God will hold us personally responsible for their sin. We have an obligatory duty to warn them face to face and not talk behind their backs. If we do not warn, then our neglect will also result in our spiritual death beyond the grave.

**SILENCE CAN BE A SIN OF OMISSION**

To keep silent in case we offend our neighbour is a serious sin of Omission. This is to neglect our moral obligation to care for their spiritual welfare. We unjustly decide to remain silent in case we offend them, while at the same time, not be concerned that our silence and their wayward lifestyle offends God greatly. In the First Reading today (Ezekiel 33:7-9), God tells us *if, however, you do warn a wicked man (woman) to renounce their ways and repent, and they do not repent, then they shall die for their sin, but you yourself will have saved your life*. When giving spiritual direction to somebody, we do so, out of Love and not out of an attitude that 'I am right and you are wrong'. All is done for the good of the community in a humble way. For example, if we hear somebody taking the **Holy Name of Jesus Christ** in vain, then we have an obligation to let them know it's a mortal sin.

**HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS BUT OPEN THEM TO GOD'S WAYS**

A hardened heart can make us slaves to sinful sensitivities and emotions. People captured by this sin of pride, angrily erupt at any suggestion to make a change in their life. Hence, many people are reluctant to involve themselves in other people's affairs, but the Holy Spirit's Gift of Courage, given in the Sacrament of Confirmation, is there to help us and to help them. Another example is when we know of unmarried couples cohabiting in sin, again, we have a duty of care to warn them of their sinful lifestyle. Nobody is out to embarrass anybody or punish them. It is all about making others aware of Jesus' teachings and working towards reconciliation with God, to avoid Hell.

**TRUE LOVE OFFENDS NOBODY**

St. Paul in the Second Reading (Romans 13:8-10), emphasises our Christian's obligation to love one another. He reminds us not to get into debt, which means not to sin against God, our spiritual Creditor. When we sin, we create an outstanding debt to Him that can lead us into spiritual bankruptcy. We must pay that back before we depart this earth, by repenting in Confession. God's Divine Mercy will wipe clean that debt. If we love each other with the same respect we love ourselves, then one will not steal from another or be jealous or want to take another person's happiness away, by destroying a marriage, for example. This should not be applauded in the Community. St. Paul says that; *Love is the one thing that cannot hurt your neighbour; that is why it is the answer to every one of the Commandments*. In Mass, we acknowledge our spiritual family ties when we pray; I confess to Almighty God *and to you my brothers and sisters*. We also pray the Lord's prayer *as brothers and sisters*, when we refer to God as, *Our Father*. We are all spiritual children of God and related to each other through baptism. Let's look out for each other and not take offence with some spiritual guidance and direction that will help us get on the road to Heaven.

**ACT OF CHARITY TO TEACH**

When Jesus invites us to live in Heaven, it is not an unconditional invitation. It depends on our hearts changing now and surrendering to His Will. We have to begin *to forgive those who trespass against us*. Jesus is not promoting hateful discrimination against each other. He wants us to help save those who have become totally blinded to the Light of Christ. He depends on us to direct that Light into the hardened darkened heart. Poverty and addiction can lead a soul down a very dark cul-de-sac (dead-end). Jesus again, expects us to turn that lost soul around and help them see the Way, the Truth and the Life. We must never judge but always reach-out. Teaching and Correction in the Spirit, are acts of Charity - each carrying a burden - that Christ first carried. God bless, Fr. Brendan.