41A Homily for the Twenty-Third Sunday of the Ordinary Time Year A

A Homily byFr Duncan Campbell O.P appeared in the Torch website

Jesus is a religious leader. He gathers followers. He still does. We are among them. In his wisdom about human nature, he made far-seeing provision for his followers’ life together. There would be problems – about leadership, facing opposition from other authorities, marriage, money, many things. St Paul had to go on into finer detail about these, as experience was gained.

We have great guidance in the church - tradition, built up from the experience of many generations. This sense of tradition was lost, sometimes. The world changes into quite different ‘worlds’. The Church has to cope.  Many different religious Orders were started, at different times. The Reformation tried, and failed - and drove many people from the Church. The world went through Ages - of Science, of Enlightenment, of Democracy, and now our Age of Entitlement, to anything and everything.  Most people are lost to the Church. They are lost. It’s wrong to think, as some do, that we in the Church must catch up and find the people waiting for us!

It will help to look at the advice Jesus gives us at the start. Here he is talking about the simplest and most common thing likely, with people living together.  Wrong-doing will take pace. What is to be done? In justice – and charity? His advice is tremendously right - of course!   
Talk frankly with the ‘offender’. You may find that what you heard is untrue. It’s malicious gossip, or some silly misunderstanding. No? It’s true! Do your best then, to convince him, he is in the wrong, and must change his ways. You may manage to put him right. If not, then you must bring others in to hear the whole story. If you find, that they agree, that he is in the wrong; and even that doesn’t change his mind, then it’s to be brought before the congregation, I’m afraid. And if the feeling of everyone, that he is in the wrong, won’t convince him, there must be something very wrong with him.

He is a danger to the good name and the peace of the community. He must be banished. It’s all very definite, practical and quite realistic  
Jesus goes on to say some very strange things - and we must listen carefully. What we decide is so important, that it may count ‘in heaven’ – ‘with God’ - and ‘for ever’. That will make us very careful about what we decide. He says another strange thing, He says he Is with us, in our prayers. We can be sure that our prayers are answered, as his prayers. Again, we must be very careful what we ask for, and agree on what we ask for. I have found this very helpful. Alone, you can think of rather unworthy things to pray about, passing an exam for instance. Others may not feel that quite so important, and ask if you did all the revision required! If you are praying for the things Jesus would pray for - things of the Spirit – the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit, you will be sure to get all these, just for the asking, and as what you would ask for, with Jesus. Ask for wisdom and you are wise. Ask for charity and you are charitable.

I finish with a thought that has helped me very much. When we hear a gospel like this, so realistic and stark, we can make use of it, in our imagination. I have tried to help quarrelling couples like this. Do they have a ‘friend to both’ who can meet them, to hear their quarrels, and decide?  No? Many don’t have such a wonderful friend, or won’t want anyone else to hear it all. Well – imagine it! Being spoken to by someone, then by a group of friends, then by the whole congregation! What are you quarrelling about? What does it look like, then? I have also asked people to be very careful about their feelings, opinions, and decisions they make. These echo to heaven, for God and all the angels to hear. Think of that!