

TWENTY THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME Year A September 7, 2014

Theme: Pastor Matthew

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Catholics have something of an **inferiority complex** when it comes to the bible.

They feel they do not know the bible nearly well as their Protestant brothers and sisters.

They can't quote texts or repeat stories as accurately.

And they feel they **overwhelmed and helpless** when confronted with a bible.

Though we have **introduced much more scripture** into the curricula of our Catholic schools and parish religious education programs, still our Catholic facility with and appreciation of the bible in our lives as Christians is woefully deficient.

The **four Gospels**, in particular, are our key texts about Jesus Christ and yet they remain a mystery to many of us.

So today let's take the text we heard from Matthew and see what we can **learn about the Gospels from this particular text.**

First, if we look in the other three Gospels of Mark, Luke and John we will **not find anything parallel** to what Matthew wrote:

---nothing about Jesus giving the instruction on a process of dealing with a brother or sister who sins,

---nothing about binding and loosing,

---and nothing about being present when two or three gather.

Why is that? Why don't the Gospels tell the same story?

Well, first they were written by four different, unique individual writers, each of whom had his own perspective and technique.

Each was also written in a different place, with its own set of circumstances and issues which influenced the writer.

For example, according to scholars Matthew may have been written to a Jewish Christian audience somewhere along the eastern Mediterranean, perhaps in current Lebanon or even Galilee.

Whereas Luke was undoubtedly written to a Gentile or non-Jewish audience probably way off in northern Greece.

The cultures of these two places, as well as those of Mark and John, were each quite different and each influenced what and how the evangelist wrote.

Another major factor which influenced the composition of the Gospel was the fact that the earliest of them, Mark, was not written until forty years after the events it reported on.

If you are old enough, try a little experiment: subtract forty years from your current age and then try to write about the three previous years, like the three years of Jesus' ministry.

I'm currently 65, subtract 40 and write about when I was 23, 24, 25; I could come up with a few highlights, but that's about it.

But the evangelists did have an advantage: the church had spent those forty in between years preaching and teaching about Jesus, telling and retelling his parables, remembering his miracles, proclaiming the story of his Passion and his Resurrection.

The Gospel writers had these forty years of experience to draw on.

Though most people at the time could not read or write, some could and a few **began to take some notes**, and put together a few collections of sayings and miracles and parables.

The Gospel writers -- and **Mark** most likely in Rome was the first about the year 70 -- were able take these memories as well as the written notes and collections and fashion them into what became known as a Gospel.

So, we come to **a pastor of a Christian community** in, let's say, far northern Galilee, known as Matthew.

His congregation is made up mostly of folks who had been faithful **practicing Jews** but who had been baptized as Christians yet continued to observe many of their Jewish religious and cultural practices.

With the destruction of the Jewish Temple and Jewish state by the Romans, more and **more Gentiles** were now joining their community and not a little tension was brewing as a result.

They needed a way to deal with this disruption in the community.

Matthew's community had received a copy the Gospel of Mark some year's earlier and now, using that as his skeleton, **Matthew penned his own Gospel adding to Mark** his own material, sayings, parables, miracles of Jesus he thought would be helpful to his community.

Thus we come to a process for dealing with sin and for reconciliation in Matthew's church as we heard in the Gospel passage of today's liturgy:

was this something handed down from Jesus or something composed in his name by Matthew or someone in his church, we do not know.

Matthew, however, as a pastor and evangelist felt **comfortable putting it into the mouth of Jesus** and including it in his Gospel as from the mouth of Jesus.

And the worshipping church has ever since **accepted this text as the Gospel** of the Lord and the Word of the Lord.

Brothers and sisters,

The Gospels are our **life line** to the Risen Jesus.

The **remarkable process** of their composition and acceptance by the church clearly was inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit promised to us by Jesus.

The more we know about the Gospels, the more we read them and let their message penetrate our hearts, the more the Good News of Jesus will **bring joy and peace to our lives**.