

St Mary Magdalene's Anglican Church
Moore Street, Adelaide

Reflection for the 14th Sunday after Pentecost

Sin and Good News

The Gospel today acknowledges that Christians are far from perfect, and Jesus sets out a procedure for dealing with sin and evil in the Church. It is salutary to consider this procedure in view of the offences committed by the Church over the centuries.

Jesus says that in the first place, a person who suffers offence must approach the offender privately and try to have the matter out. This should be done without the offender losing face, and without a feud being induced. Should this approach fail, Jesus says the matter should be brought to the attention of the Church authorities and witnesses should be called to give their evidence. Should the matter remain unresolved after this, then it needs to be taken to the civil authorities and settled accordingly.

It is clear, then, that we need to do two things. First we need to acknowledge the reality of our own sinfulness and second, to maintain the reality that the Gospel of Christ is 'good news'. The mercy and forgiveness of God remain valid for all but people who commit sin need to repent of their sin.

We all have a massive say in our destiny in eternal terms. We may choose not to repent, and that choice may well drive us out of immediate contention for God's forgiveness. Christianity is a religion which requires its people to behave well in ordinary life. This means that today's Gospel is a warning that we need to look at ourselves. It is like a warning printed on the packaging of some food items about ingredients which may cause health problems. We normally regard these warnings as helpful and not threatening.

So Jesus is not sabre-rattling in this Gospel reading. He is speaking to his followers with goodwill and love. We must love God with all our heart, mind and soul. There is forgiveness from God if we fail to live according to his will but we need to repent of our failing.

Our sins were forgiven in Baptism, and our subsequent sins are forgiven liturgically in Mass or in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Church's liturgy also helps us to be alert to warnings signs about our behaviour, in prayers of confession, repentance, and for God's help and support. We are lucky to have all this to our advantage. But in the end it will be up to us and the choices we make for ourselves about our behaviour. For now, we continue on our journey together as we make our ways through this life.

Fr Graeme Kaines