

**THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES**  
**September 10, 2017**  
**The Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Ezekiel 33:7-9 + Romans 13:8-10 + Matthew 18:15-20**

*For where two or three are*  
**GATHERED TOGETHER IN MY NAME,**  
*there am I in the midst of them.*  
**MATTHEW 18:20**

**Reflection by: Sister Elizabeth Michael Boyle, O.P.**

In today's gospel, Jesus' instruction to his disciples seems to describe the foundation for a "bottom-up" Christian moral theology. His words are addressed not to a conference of bishops but to the whole people of God. Jesus begins at the personal level by recommending a gentle, common-sense fraternal correction with maximum respect for a sinner's privacy and confidence in the forum of individual conscience. Apparently, he acknowledges, however, that the sinner's conscience can be less than honest, so Jesus next ordains a collaborative fact-checking procedure leading to a judgment involving the rest of the community. Agreement among the majority will be the sign that God endorses the community's human judgment: "Again amen I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." But this does not mean that right and wrong should be dictated by popular vote. Jesus' final promise to participate in the discernment process includes a challenging condition: "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*"

The Christian community today is faced with moral decisions of a complexity neither Jesus nor his disciples could have imagined. And whenever controversial issues are discussed publicly, there is an immediate rush to politicize them—and lately to create slogans and banners glorifying one side and vilifying the other. Jesus' promise to be wherever two or three gather in his name suggests that we ask: In the midst of which group can we imagine Jesus looking more comfortable?