**14th SUNDAY after PENTECOST SERMON: Matthew 18:15-20**

In last Sunday’s Gospel reading, Jesus said in no uncertain terms: *“If you want to be my disciple …. Deny … carry … follow.”*  These, in a nutshell, are the three elements of discipleship. Today, I wish to share with you the third element of discipleship -- what is involved in ***following* of Jesus as outlined by the Gospel reading.**

**Now to follow Christ as his disciple involves** living our life according to his teachings and example – whether we live our life in our own family, in our larger Church family or in our larger community or society.

Now these teachings and example of Jesus were faithfully taught by the apostles and were preserved for us in writing – in Scriptures, in the Bible. This is what we mean when we say that the Bible contains the Lord’s blueprint for the way we live our lives as followers – disciples of Him.

Take for instance our gospel reading today: It specifically describes a blueprint on how we are to relate to one another in community especially how do we handle conflict.

Jesus starts by saying: "***If your brother sins against you***….” What do you do? For Jesus, he says, take the initiative …… *go and tell him his fault. Just between the two of you.*" We do not wait for the other person to come to us. We go to the person who hurt us, tell him how he hurt us. THE GOAL IS FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION, not revenge and contempt. (Not easy – but the thing to do). You shall have won your brother.

***If your brother will not listen***, Christ continues, *call in two or three witnesses*. Let your witnesses confirm the hurt. Let witnesses testify to the hurts, it might bring awareness of painful behavior.

***If nothing happens***, Christ says, *tell the church*. Now Church can refer to the local congregation.

***What happens if nothing happens*?** Jesus says, "*treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.*" DISCIPLINE. At first glance, this seems harsh and punitive. But it could mean differently if we look at how Jesus treated Gentiles and tax collectors. Jesus invited them to a change of life.

Remember the day Jesus stopped at the well, and asked a woman for a drink of water. The woman was surprised, and asked why a Jew would ask a woman and a Samaritan for water. As the story went, she was not just a Gentile but a Samaritan – an enemy; not only a woman who is not Jewish, but a sinful woman. What does Jesus do? He tells the woman he will give her the gift of living water. – a new life.

Take another story, the calling of Matthew, the tax collector, to be his disciple (Matthew 10:3; Luke 5:27). Tax collectors were nasty people. They were cheats. No one liked the tax collector. How does Jesus treat the tax collector? He calls him to be a disciple: a change of life.

This is what Jesus have us to do. What we could not bring about in terms of forgiveness and reconciliation – then we have to engage in a harder and more committed action – work for his conversion, for his change of life.

This is just one example of how the bible functions as a blueprint for the way we are to live our lives as Christians individually and in community. The bible as blueprint for living has more to offer. It is an inexhaustible treasure waiting to be discovered.

That is why today I want to invite you to read and study the Bible, God’s blueprint for our lives. Of course, you could study the Bible alone, by yourself, but being involved in a small group bible study is the preferred model. This was the argument made by Jesus in the final verse of today’s gospel lesson. “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

Now how do we apply this lesson about the Bible as the blueprint in our lives today in the face of the corona virus pandemic, in the face of racial conflicts, in the face of the political contradictions especial during the election season?

The Bible as a blueprint means that we look at, analyze, and respond to the issues of the pandemic, racial and political conflicts from the point of view of the Bible teaching. Let these issues and conflicts be opportunities for forgiveness and reconciliation: a time to seek and to defend the truth; an invitation to a change of life, and attitudes…of conversion. During this difficult and trying times of the pandemic, let us learn to be generous and compassionate to one another, especially the sick and the bereaved.

This is how we grow in discipleship. This is how we live our lives today as followers of Christ.

This is my wish and prayer for all of us, Amen.