

TWENTY THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, 2026

“Truly 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.” (Matthew 18:18)

In this passage, the Lord Jesus gives to His Church the power to identify sin (binding) and to forgive sin (loosing).

Simply as individuals, no one in the Church has authority to declare something to be sin, but the Church as a whole has that authority, because Jesus Christ lives in His Church. In a sense, “who am I to judge?” is what every Christian has to say; but, in another sense, “who am I to judge?” is a terribly irresponsible thing for any Christian to say. On one’s own, no Christian has authority to name and shame sin. United in Jesus Christ, however, the Christian People do indeed have the authority to name and shame sin, and the world needs them to do this, lest it hurl itself off a moral cliff and destroy itself. That authority is exercised by the Church in an organized way, centered on the apostolic ministry of the bishops, led by Peter’s Successor, the Bishop of Rome.

Similarly, no individual Christian has any power on his own to forgive sins, but the Church as a whole has that authority, because Jesus Christ lives in His Church. No one can forgive sins save God alone, as every Christian needs to know; but Jesus Christ is God incarnate, as every Christian also needs to know. No individual Christian can forgive sins. United in Jesus Christ, however, the Christian People do indeed have power to forgive sins, and the world needs them to do this, since sin abounds. That authority is exercised by the Church in an organized way, centered on the ministry of Elders/Presbyters/Priests (three words for one ordained ministry) in the Sacrament of Penance, led by their bishop.

The essential point here is simply that Jesus Christ truly lives in His Church. “Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the world” are the Lord’s last words in St. Matthew’s Gospel (Matthew 28:20). Earlier in Matthew’s Gospel, in today’s Gospel reading, He makes the promise, “Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I, in their midst” (Matthew 18:20). Jesus Christ lives perfectly united to His Heavenly Father, yet He also lives in His Church. Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, the Incarnate Mediator between God and Man, lives forever with His Father and in His Church.

Now, we mortals in this life can only be in one place at a time, because we are controlled by time and space. The Risen Lord Jesus Christ, however, is sovereign over time and space. They do not control Him, He controls them. This is indicated in the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection. Quite suddenly, although the doors to the Upper Room were locked, Jesus was physically with the Eleven, and equally suddenly, without any apparent movement, He was not. St. Luke describes how, on that same Easter evening, perhaps at the very same time, the Risen Lord appeared to two disciples on the Road to Emmaus, although He assumed a form they did not recognize. He spoke to them in such a way that their hearts burned within them. Still, they did not recognize Him until He broke the Bread with them. Then, suddenly, they recognized Him, and, equally suddenly He departed from them, again without any apparent movement.

The Lord’s revelation of Himself in the Breaking of the Bread is particularly important to notice. The supreme worship He gave to His Church, with the command “Do this in Memory of Me,” was to break the Bread and take up the Cup. At the Last Supper, and on the road to Emmaus, the Lord Jesus in His own Person consecrated the Bread and Wine to become vessels of His sacred, sin forgiving and life giving presence. Since then, it is in the person of

the Church's Elders/Presbyters/Priests that He so consecrates the Eucharistic Bread and Wine. The visible Person is different, but the Person truly consecrating remains the same, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ lives in His Church, and in His Church, through the lowly person of any and every duly ordained priest, He still consecrates the Eucharistic Bread and Wine.

The Most Blessed Eucharist is His Church's primary Memorial of His Presence. The Lord Jesus Christ's presence in His Church is not limited to the Eucharist, but it is focused on the Eucharist. Always, and in many different ways, He is truly present to His People spiritually. In the Most Blessed Eucharist, He is also present to His People physically. He is not present in a way that sight can recognize. Only Faith can recognize His presence. That is true of His spiritual presence when His People read the Sacred Scriptures, pray together, and perform works of charity. It is even more true of the Most Blessed Eucharist, in which He is present Body and Blood, as well as Soul and Divinity.

It might be said that during His earthly ministry, people saw Him without recognizing Him. Now, in His Church, His People can recognize Him, without seeing Him.

Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, the One Mediator between God and Man, is truly present with us, His People, even to the end of the world. By the gift of Faith, we recognize Him without seeing Him. Without seeing or feeling His hand or breath, we receive and pass on forgiveness of sins. Without seeing or feeling His Flesh and Blood, we are nourished with them unto Eternal Life. Even the most faithful among us can barely begin to grasp how highly favored we are.

He is with us, His Church, always, even to the end of the world. Sometimes we have to believe this, without feeling it at all. Looking back, however, at the end of our earthly lives, and even in moments of blessed retreat during our earthly activities, we will realize that Jesus Christ has been with us all along, such that we can almost smell the incense of Heaven and see the glory of the attending angels.

All of the Sacraments and prayers of the Church are like that, including the Blessed Eucharist. Sometimes we celebrate them without feeling or noticing anything at all. Sometimes we may even be annoyed at having to do them. Yet to have the Faith, even the mumbling and grumbling Faith, to celebrate the Church's Rites opens us to the loving and divine Presence that changes us, little by little, into saints. Little by little, even as we grumble, we put on Christ and become like Him, as we faithfully celebrate the rites of the Church, especially the Blessed Eucharist. Becoming like Him in this life, we will move easily at the end of this life into a happy Eternity.

So, recognizing His Presence, in which we come to know and reject sin, in which we receive and share forgiveness of sins, and in which we are nourished for Eternal Life, may we stop worrying about things for the rest of this Liturgy, and simply give thanks.

"Be still and know that I am God!"

"The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." (Psalm 46:10-11)

Amen.