

Two weeks ago we heard Peter pronounced as the 'rock on which Jesus would build His Church'. As part of that commissioning he was told 'whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven'. Today, two Sundays and two chapters of Matthew later, those exact same words are repeated - but this time they are addressed to **all the disciples** together.

It is important to notice this.

We are familiar with the power of binding and loosing as being part of the Petrine ministry, meaning the ministry of Peter continued in the bishops of Rome, ie. the Popes. Perhaps we are comfortable with leaving it there because then it's something clerical, distant, remote, **and not our responsibility!**

Once we see that Jesus repeats the power of binding and loosing to all the disciples, we cannot just sit back and leave it to Popes and Bishops. It is given collectively to the whole church. **It is, at least in part, our responsibility!**

To realise that we have a part to play, not just in our own salvation, but in the salvation of the world, is really rather terrifying. But that is the message from Ezekiel in the first reading and in the first part of today's gospel: if there is something wrong then, with due discernment and prudence, we should intervene and challenge. And according to Ezekiel, failure to do so will be judged as a failed responsibility.

In this context the final part of the gospel 'where two or three are gathered...' is more than just the cosy warmth of Jesus' presence with us. When we act together as His Church, Jesus is truly present, exercising His priesthood through the Church for the salvation of the world.

A final and moderating word from Paul in the second reading: 'love is the answer to all the commandments'. When it comes to intervening and challenging for the salvation of the world, it must be done in love, and indeed in grace, or else it will fail. **This is a tough requirement, and rarely is it completely fulfilled.** To confront without the desire to win, without ego, without bitterness, without recrimination, but simply desiring the loving growth of the other - requires the grace of God and much discernment.

People who make a career out of always challenging and intervening are tiresome. They rush in all the time telling others what to do and how to do it. After a while they get tuned out as unloving background noise. People who never challenge, who will never say boo to any goose are equally unhelpful.

It's when the quiet, unassuming, loving, friend unexpectedly turns round and gently but firmly says no to me that I need to listen carefully, because the loving Word of God may be being proclaimed to me at that moment, for my correction and my growth.