

# A Two-Way Challenge

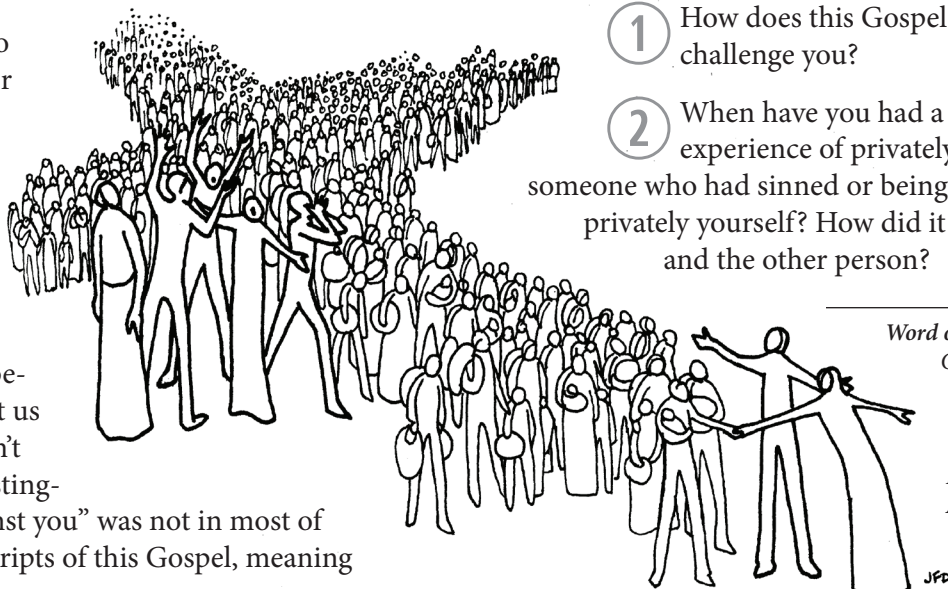
*This Week's Readings at Mass*

- Ezekiel 33:7-9 • The prophet a watchman
- Romans 13:8-10 • Love fulfills the Law
- Matthew 18:15-20 • Fraternal correction

The first reading and the Gospel reading today both address the responsibility of believers to call out and name injustice and sinfulness when they see it. In the Old Testament reading, God tells the prophet, Ezekiel, that he must speak out to dissuade wicked people from doing harm, or he will be responsible for their deaths. Likewise, Jesus gives his disciples instructions for confronting those who have done wrong.

Jesus' teaching in the Gospel reading today about reconciling someone who has sinned is a challenge for two kinds of Christians. First, it is a challenge to those in the Church community who judge others publicly—boldly proclaiming in print, from the pulpit, or in the media. It is often easier for an accuser to go public with an accusation than address the matter privately and with more humility and sensitivity first. Jesus is asking such accusers to do the hard work of personal conversation first, which may have the effect of helping the accuser to grow in understanding and acceptance of the “sinner.” (Of course, Jesus isn't asking people to put themselves in danger to do so, for example, asking a victim to approach her rapist in private.)

Jesus' words are also a challenge for other Christians who are too hesitant or timid to call out sinfulness and injustice when they see it. Sometimes we let injustice continue because it doesn't hurt us directly—the sin isn't “against” us. Interestingly, the phrase “against you” was not in most of the ancient manuscripts of this Gospel, meaning



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“Whatever you bind on earth is bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

**Sheepish Question:**  
What is it about the good news of Jesus that I'm keeping from people I love? Why?

it was probably added later. So Jesus was calling on his disciples to privately point out their brother's sin (before escalating to a broader audience), regardless of whether they were directly impacted. Jesus is asking for courage here to stand up for any victim who is hurt by another's behavior. When a white person confronts another white person privately for a racist comment, that is the first step toward growth and reconciliation.

## Questions of the Week

- 1 How does this Gospel reading most challenge you?
- 2 When have you had a growthful experience of privately confronting someone who had sinned or being confronted privately yourself? How did it change you and the other person?

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