

Scripture Study

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Cycle B



Opening prayer

Numbers 11:25-29

Psalm 19:8, 10, 12-14)

James 5:1-6

Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday's Gospel is a continuation of last week's reading (Mark 9:30-37).
- The disciples, rebuked by Jesus in their attempt to claim for themselves a prominent place in his Kingdom, resort to attacking a man who, while not of their own circle, is performing exorcisms in Jesus' name. Due their own recently failed attempt at this type of healing (Mark 9:14-29), they may have felt a little insecure!
- Jesus urges tolerance for those who are not opposing him and, in a certain way, honor his name by acknowledging its power. He goes on to relate this to how all of his disciples (the "little ones") should be treated. He makes it abundantly clear that this is a serious matter with either reward (verse 41)— or dire consequences.
- Gehenna, or Valley of Hinnom, (to which Jesus refers in verses 43-45) was a small ravine outside of Jerusalem where during Israel's early history, child sacrifice had been offered to pagan gods, even by one of Israel's particularly evil kings, Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:1-3). In Jesus time, as an unclean place, it was a dump where rubbish burned night and day, and had become proverbial as a metaphor for eternal punishment (Jeremiah 7:30-33).

Questions:

- In the First Reading, why do you think young Joshua was "jealous for the sake of Moses"? What do you think was his attitude toward the gifts of God and how God chose to give them? What is your attitude to those who seem unlikely recipients of God's gifts?
- Looking at the Second Reading: how have you used your personal resources—such as money, influence, talent, or time—for the benefit of others? How might you seek God's wisdom to learn how you should use your resources?
- What does Jesus' application of the image of Gehenna (and that of Isaiah 66:24) tell you about the seriousness of how he regards the sin of scandal?
- In verses 43, 45, and 47, what four things does Jesus say are "better" than becoming an occasion of sin (In the Greek, *scandalon*: literally, a stumbling block) to others? What is his point in using this hyperbole? Short of cutting off body parts, what do you need to cut out of your life in order to avoid sin?
- How does the attitude Jesus wants us to have regarding rivalry and exclusivism reflect that of John the Baptist (John 3:25-30)? St. Paul (Galatians 5:19-26)? St. James (James 3:13-18)? How does your own attitude compare?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 1034, 2284-87

Closing prayer

Would you like to see God glorified by you? Then rejoice in your brother's progress and you will immediately give glory to God. Because His servant could conquer envy by rejoicing in the merits of others, God will be praised. St. John Chrysostom

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

"You bear the name of Christ"

Scripture: Mark 9:38-48

Meditation: Do you rejoice in the good that others do? Jesus reprimands his disciples for their jealousy and suspicion. They were upset that someone who was not of their company was performing a spiritual work in the name of Jesus. They even "forbade" the man "because he was not following us". Jesus' reply is filled with wisdom: "No one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me." Are we not like the disciples when we get upset at the good deeds of others who seem to shine more than us? Paul says that "love is not jealous... but rejoices in the right" (1 Corinthians 13:4,6). Envy and jealousy, its counterpart, are sinful because they lead us to sorrow over what should make us rejoice – namely, our neighbor's good. The reason we may grieve over our another's good is that somehow we see that good as lessening our own value or excellence. Envy forms when we believe that the other person's advantage or possession diminishes or brings disgrace on us. Envy is contrary to love. Both the object of love and the object of envy is our neighbor's good, but by contrary movements, since love rejoices in our neighbor's good, while envy grieves over it. How can we overcome envy? With the love that God has put into our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). The Holy Spirit purifies our heart and frees us from our disordered passions, such as envy, jealousy, greed, and bitterness. God's love is a generous and selfless love which is wholly oriented towards our good. The love that God places in our hearts seeks the highest good of our neighbor. God's love purifies and frees us from all envy and jealousy – and it compels us to give generously, especially to those who lack what they need. Everyone in need has a claim on us because they are dear to God who created them in his own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). God created us in love for love. We are



most free and happy when we love as he loves. The love and charitable help we show to our neighbor also expresses the gratitude we have for the abundant mercy and kindness of God towards us. Jesus declared that any kindness shown and any help given to those in need would not lose its reward. Jesus never refused to give to anyone in need who asked for his help. As his disciples we are called to be kind and generous as he is. Are you grateful for God's mercy and kindness towards you and are you ready to show that same kindness and generosity towards your neighbor?

Gregory of Nyssa, an early church father (330-395 AD), comments on this passage: "God never asks his servants to do what is impossible. The love and goodness of his Godhead is revealed as richly available. It is poured out like water upon all. God furnished to each person according to his will the ability to do something good. None of those seeking to be saved will be lacking in this ability, given by the one who said: 'whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his reward.'" Ask the Lord to increase your generosity in doing good for others.

Do you rejoice in the good that others do? Jesus reprimands his disciples for their jealousy and suspicion. They were upset that someone who was not of the same company of disciples as themselves was casting out a demon in the name of Jesus. They even "forbade" the man "because he was not following us". Jesus' reply is filled

with wisdom: "No one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me." Are we not like the disciples when we get upset at the good others do because of jealousy or fear? Paul says that "love is not jealous... but rejoices in the right" (1 Corinthians 13:4,6).

Was Jesus' exaggerating when he urged his followers to use drastic measures to avoid evil and its harmful consequences (Mark 9:42-47)? Jesus set before his disciples the one supreme goal in life that is worth any sacrifice, and that goal is God himself and his will for our lives which leads to everlasting peace and happiness. Just as a doctor might remove a limb or some part of the body in order to preserve the life of the whole body, so we must be ready to part with anything that causes us to sin and which leads to spiritual death. Jesus warns his disciples of the terrible responsibility that they must set no stumbling block in the way of another, that is, not give offense or bad example that might lead another to sin. The Greek word for temptation (*scandalon*) is exactly the same as the English word scandal. The original meaning of scandal is a trap or a stumbling block which causes one to trip and fall. The Jews held that it was an unforgivable sin to teach another to sin. If we teach another to sin, he in turn may teach still another, until a train of sin is set in motion with no foreseeable end. The young in faith are especially vulnerable to the bad example of those who should be passing on the faith. Do you set a good example for others to follow, especially the young?

"Lord Jesus, fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may radiate the joy of the gospel to others. May your light and truth shine through me that others may find new life and freedom from sin and the corruption of evil."

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