

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2012

The readings of this Sunday talk about God's generosity and the human duty to accept it. They show how God gives his gifts indiscriminately to anyone as he wants. They also invite us to be open and rejoice over the gifts and talents of our brothers and sisters, as they all contribute to the building of God's kingdom.

The first reading from the Book of Numbers describes the incident that happened when Moses chose, according to God's order, seventy elders as judges in order to help him in leading the people of Israel. In fact, God took some of the spirit that was on Moses and bestowed it on them. However, two of them, who were in the camp and not in the sanctuary with the remaining, received the spirit in the same way as the others and started prophesying.

When informed about the situation, Joshua, the assistant to Moses, requested that Moses stop them. Instead of listening to him, Moses denounced his attitude and insisted that it would be good that all the people of God prophesy and be filled with his spirit.

What is behind this text is the idea that God, in his generosity, bestows his gifts and grace on his people without any discrimination. There is also the truth that jealousy and envy plague the work of God and jeopardize the growth of his kingdom among his people. Therefore, what contributes to unity and peaceful coexistence is tolerance and acceptance of the gifts and talents of everybody.

This text helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel, as Jesus invites his disciples to be tolerant toward the one who was casting out demons in his name without being part of the group of the twelve.

First of all, the Gospel says that, as John related the incident, Jesus forbade them to prevent that man to do his job. For Jesus, indeed, no one can perform mighty deeds in his name and at the same time speak ill of him. After that, Jesus spoke of the reward that will be given to anyone who, because of Jesus, is generous with his disciples.

Finally, the Gospel ends up with the warning of Jesus toward anyone who scandalizes the little ones who believe in him. For Jesus, indeed, it would even be better that such a person might not have existed. That is the reason why he insists on cutting off the members of our body and throwing them away if they are an occasion of sin.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing I want to highlight is about learning to be tolerant and accepting of others. In fact, when Jesus ordered his disciples not to stop the one who was not part of their group, but still cast out the demons in his name, he was inviting us to tolerance.

This point is very crucial for our life in society, in the church, and for our relationship with one another. As human experience has taught us, there exists in each one of us an inborn instinct to prudence and caution, especially when we are dealing with people we do not know well enough. Such caution is certainly something normal, if we do not want to be victims of our naivety and credulity.

However, if we do not pay attention enough, such an attitude can lead us to exclusion, discrimination and even rejection of others because not only do they not belong to our circle of life, but they are not like us or they do not share our ideas and vision.

That is the point Jesus brings in the Gospel by inviting the disciples not to stop the person who was casting out demons in his name without being part of his circle. By doing so, Jesus teaches us that God, in his generosity, can give his gift to anyone independently of the group to which someone is part.

If that is the case, we have to accept the others and to be tolerant toward them, even when they do not belong to us. Is that a sign of weakness or the acceptance of relativism? Not at all. As far as people proclaim Jesus crucified and risen from the dead, as far as they do not deny his divinity or teach heresies, they are with us. It is this point that has led the Church to the principle of ecumenism, namely that the truth of Jesus can be found to some extent in other denominations, even if the Catholic Church has the plenitude of the truth.

The second point I want to highlight is about the importance of eternal salvation. One of the things that strikes in this Gospel is the fact that any deed done to a disciple of Jesus will certainly have a reward. In that sense, there is nothing done in the name of Jesus and for the sake of Jesus' kingdom that will remain without recompense.

If that is true then, it means that anywhere there is a human need, it belongs to us, as disciples of Jesus, to intervene and to provide for what is lacking. We do it with a clear conscience that we do something good for which recompense is promised. But, we do it also with a sharp awareness of prolonging the gesture of Jesus among our human fellows, because if Jesus were confronted with the same situation, he would not have remained indifferent. Moreover, what Jesus asks of us is not that we do great things, but rather that we give just a cup of water. A cup of water, indeed, stands for the simplest act we can perform on a daily basis in the name of Jesus. That is the ground for the social teaching of the Church and the concern for social justice as attested in the second reading.

If doing good to someone in need brings a reward, it means ipso facto that preventing someone to come to eternal salvation brings us a punishment. That is the reason why Jesus insists that if one of our members brings us to sin, it is better to cut it off and enter the kingdom of God amputated.

Are not those words hard to hear? And yet, they come from the mouth of Jesus. The point of these words is to remind that if sin is a bad thing, to teach others to sin is worse. Therefore, it is our duty to avoid anything that can bring our fellows into sin. We have to pay attention to what we say and do so that it might be pure and not an occasion for sin. That is the grace we have to ask in this Mass. May God bless you all!

Numbers 11: 25-29; James 5: 1-6; Mark 9: 38-43, 45, 47-48



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