

## Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time B2018

The readings of this Sunday talk about God's generosity. They show that God gives his gifts and talents to anyone he wants and without discrimination. They invite us to be open to others as they build the kingdom of God with their gifts and talents.

The first reading describes the incident that happened when Moses chose seventy elders as his aides. It shows how he took some of his spirit and passed it on to them, according to the instructions received from God. It equally shows the manifestations that followed once they were filled with the spirit.

The text describes also the incident that happened when two people who were not with the elders received the spirit in the same way as they did. After that, the text relates the attempt of Joshua, the second to Moses, to stop them. The text ends up with the reaction of Moses in favor of the two men.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is generous and openhanded. There is also the idea that jealousy and envy jeopardize the growth of the work of God. The last idea is related to the truth that tolerance and acceptance of one another's gifts builds the kingdom of God.

This text helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel, as Jesus invites his disciples to tolerance. First of all, the Gospel starts with the mention of John reporting the incident of someone casting out demons without being part of the group of the twelve. Then, it gives the reaction of Jesus who forbade them to prevent such a one.

After that, it gives the reason why they should not prevent him from doing his job, as well as it speaks of the reward reserved to those who are generous. The Gospel ends with Jesus' warning about the danger of driving others to sin.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today, I want to talk about tolerance. 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 them to tolerance and the acceptance of the others.

As it was in the time of Jesus, so is it today. This point remains very crucial for our relationship with one another. As human experience has taught us, there exists in each one of us an innate instinct to prudence and caution. Such caution and prudence are certainly legitimate and normal, because they can help us avoid being victims of naivety and credulity.

However, over-prudence or over-caution can lead to exclusion, discrimination and even the rejection of others. Why? Well, the configuration of our society makes it easy that we can always find reasons for not teaming with people. That could be the case when people do not belong to our circle of life, or are not like us, or do not share our ideas and vision of things.

That is why the invitation of Jesus to his disciples, to not stop the one casting the demons in his name, is very important to us. It means that Jesus wants to tell the disciples that God, in his generosity, can give his gift to anyone independently of the group to which he belongs.

Therefore, they have to be tolerant and to accept the others even if they do not belong to them. The same is true for us: we have to be tolerant and accepting of others even if we do not share the same ideas with them.

Does it mean that by doing so, we accept relativism? No; on the contrary, we show our realism by recognizing that God has created the world in such a way that we are differently and diversely gifted. Should anyone, then, hold a view different from ours, it does not mean a priori that he is against us. Consequently, 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 such a vision that has led the Church to the promotion of ecumenism, namely the idea that the truth of Jesus can be found also in other denominations, even if the Catholic Church has the plenitude of the truth.

By the same token, the criteria for eternal salvation have to be measured also with regard to the good deeds accomplished in the name of Jesus, as we find in Matthew 25. That is why for Jesus even a cup of water given to someone because he belongs to him is worth a reward.

This creates for us duty and obligations toward the needy. That is why wherever there is a need, it is our duty 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. I believe that we have always to ask this question: If Jesus was confronted with such a situation, how would he react? That will lead us in turn to imitate him. Overlooking asking this question makes us very often cruel and mean toward others.

Moreover, what Jesus asks of us is not that we do extraordinary 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 and of our faith. 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 Jesus wants to make is to remind us that if sin is a bad thing, then, 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 not be 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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