

TWENTY SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME B2024

Today's readings invite us to meditate on intolerance due to religious motivation and its effects on the domain of social justice. The first reading describes the situation of Israel in the aftermath of their liberation from Egypt.

At that time, as Moses was overwhelmed with the leadership over Israel, God enjoined him to find some relief by appointing seventy elders who could help him as judges over Israel. For these to operate efficiently, God bestowed upon them some of the spirit that was given to Moses. All seventy elders got the charism given to Moses and started prophesying. Two of them who were not present at the gathering received also the spirit in the same way as the others.

As a reaction, Joshua, the assistant to Moses, protested and wanted to stop them for not having been with the others. Curiously, Moses rebuked him by denouncing his jealousy. For Moses, it would be a good thing that all the people of God be prophets and be filled with his spirit.

As it appears, the text teaches us that God is without discrimination. He gives his gifts and talents to each one according to his bounty and even outside the established structures.

If we could only be happy for what our fellows receive from God and tolerate each other, how wonderful life would be. The "ghetto mentality", instead of contributing to our human and spiritual growth, is detrimental to our unity and a peaceful coexistence among us.

This point is exactly what Jesus brings in the Gospel. As John was complaining about someone who was driving out demons in his name without being of the group, Jesus prohibited preventing him. For Jesus, no one can perform mighty deeds in his name and at the same time speak ill of him.

Here Jesus invites us to strive see God's Spirit at work whenever we meet good people even if they do not belong to our Church. Whoever acts rightly according to one's conscience is for Jesus. On our part, we should love and respect every person no matter how different he or she might be. We should also remember that the truth is always bigger than any individual's grasp of it. No one can completely grasp the whole truth.

The basis for the principle of tolerance is not a lazy acceptance that there is truth everywhere, but rather the recognition that Jesus himself is the truth. Intolerance would be a sign of both arrogance and ignorance, because it is a sign that people believe there is no truth beyond what they know and see.

This does not mean that we have to renounce the truth we hold in catholic tradition. It means that a ray of truth and much goodness are found everywhere. If people are spreading errors in order to destroy moral values and the foundations of faith, Christian civilization, they must be combated. However, the way of combating them should never be to eliminate them by force or weapons, but to prove to them that they are wrong.

We may not share a person's opinion or belief, but we must never hate the person. As the French Writer Voltaire wrote once, "I hate what you say"; but I would die for your right to say it".

Because Jesus is the truth that gives us eternal salvation, anyone who does good in his name will receive a reward. Any kindness shown, any help given to the people of Christ will always receive a reward. Anyone in need has claim upon us because of our belonging to Jesus. This is one of the foundations of the social doctrine of the Church, namely that we have an obligation toward the needy among us because of Jesus.

Therefore, as his disciples, we continue his work and mission by caring for our brothers and sisters who are in need. By doing so, we give evident testimony of our belonging to Jesus. What is expected of us is not to do extraordinary things, but just to give a cup of water to a needy. A cup of water stands for the simplest thing anyone can do on a daily basis in the name of Jesus.

If being a disciple of Jesus means to do good to others and to win a reward, then, to cause a weak brother or sister to stumble is to harm him and, therefore, to win our eternal punishment. In other words, to sin is a bad thing but to teach others to sin is terribly worse. That is why our Lord is talking about cutting off the hand or the foot, or to pluck out the eye to symbolize the integrity of our action, the cleanness of our movement and the decency of our look. Everything we do should be perfect and pure so that we do not bring others into sin.

Because, as disciples of Jesus, we are called to do good to others, then the question of social justice becomes important for us. That explains why St James is harsh with the rich who exploit the poor. He warns them that if they do not give to their workers their due wages and cheat on them, they run a big risk. A day will come where their gold and silver will rust.

Rust and corrosion are proof of the impermanence and the no-value of earthly things. Therefore, any rich person who does not play a fair game with the poor will finish badly. Anyone who chooses this way of conduct chooses also hid end. Such a person is like a fattened cow. The end of a fattened cow is that it will be one day slaughtered for some feast. And those who have chosen to live in selfishness, without any regard for social justice, are like men who have fattened themselves for the Day of Judgment. Selfishness always leads to the destruction of the soul.

Let me finish with a prayer: Father in heaven, help us take seriously these words of warning and work for social justice. Like Moses, allow us to recognize our limits in the things we do and ask the help we need. Please, give us the courage to recognize the gifts and talents of our brothers and sisters while we thank you for their presence in our midst for the good of the whole body of Christ.

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



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