

## REFLECTION FOR 26<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR B

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

Today's readings give us a strong warning against jealousy, intolerance and giving scandal.

Those of you who are old enough can testify how, in the past, you were taught the world is made up of Catholics and non-Catholics. Us and them.

This in fact is not peculiar to a church society but that is the way the world is divided up. You are my friend or you're not my friend. Those who are in and those who are out. We and them.

In the first reading, Joshua asked Moses to stop the two men (Eldad and Medad) who were prophesying in their camp. Moses answered him, 'Are you jealous? I wish all the Lord's people were prophets and the Lord gave His Spirit to them all.'

In the Gospel, John said to Jesus, 'We saw a man who is not one of us casting out devils in your name; and because he was not one of us, we tried to stop him. But Jesus said, 'You must not stop him'. ***"Anyone who is not against us is for us:"***

Jesus did not come into the world to establish them and us, but to remove what divides us.

Jesus is saying to us, you need to identify goodness because everything God has made is good. And if you can find that goodness, there is no longer them and us.

God's power, mercy, holiness, love, special gifts and salvation, cannot be the exclusive possession of any particular group, people, or Church.

One does not have to belong to any privileged group in order to receive God's special gifts and favours. We must not be jealous or envious of the gifts of others.

We should celebrate the diverse gifts and charisms of all people – because God blesses indiscriminately, and certainly, God does not restrict his friendship and grace to the institutional leaders, clergy and religious. We must open ourselves to identifying, nurturing, and promoting God's gifts in all God's people- men and women, young and old.

**Let us learn the Christian virtue of tolerance:** Tolerance involves a respect for various aspects and facets of the truth. Christian tolerance is brotherly love; it asks that we bear with the weaknesses of others, without condoning the evil they do.

Intolerance is a sign of a weak Faith. Intolerance gives the impression that nothing is true beyond what we know. Intolerance is also ineffective. An intolerant attitude will alienate, rather than attract, sinners.

Only genuine *agape* love can overcome hatred. The Church should display this patient love to a hate-filled world, and love others as Christ loves us.

Let us try to learn and to practice the virtue of Christian love in our interfaith and ecumenical endeavours by: (a) respecting the differences we encounter, (b) working together on projects of common interest, (c) affirming what is good in the other person's

position, even when we disagree on certain things, and (d) allowing the light of Christ to shine through our loving words and deeds.

Jesus is saying, if you get this wrong, you will bring down others, you will destroy their faith and those bad attitudes not only destroy us but destroy others and prevent the kingdom of God becoming a reality in the world.

We give scandal and become stumbling blocks to others: (a) when we are unkind or unjust in our treatment of people, when we reject them because of their weakness, faults or sins, (b) when we humiliate people by hurting their pride and damaging their self-image, (c) when we discourage, ignore, or refuse to accept people, (d) when we live a double standard life, when we set standards which we are unable to meet ourselves, and (e) when we become judgmental of those who are still struggling to reach a level of commitment that we feel is too low to be useful.

Jesus uses a very strong language and says it is better for us to cut off our hands and feet if they lead us astray. Jesus is saying to us, if there is anything in our lives which is coming between us and a perfect obedience to the will of God, it must be rooted out.

So, for example, if your computer is your problem, then turn it off. If a particular television causes you to sin, change the channel. If the bottle is your problem, then break your habit of drinking. If your job becomes more important than your family, if greed overwhelms your goodness, then change, in order to be fully obedient to the will of God.

On the other hand, we become good role models: a) when we support and guide others in moments of doubt, weakness, and suffering, b) when we increase other people's self-confidence by accepting them as they are and enabling them to discover their hidden talents, c) when we help people to grow by inspiring and empowering them, d) when we forgive people and listen to them with patience, and e) when we make ourselves examples of Christian witnessing.

Jesus declares in today's Gospel reading that any kindness shown, any help given to the people of Christ, will not lose its reward. The Christian with the mind of Christ is one who can recognise human needs and minister to them as Jesus did.

In the words of St Teresa of Calcutta, the gospel is written on our five fingers: you-did-it-to-me. At the end of our life, our five fingers will either accuse us or excuse us.

Our vocation as Christians is to help, to love and to be for others another Christ.

Fr Patrick