

Homily of Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B, 2021

Numbers 11:25-29; Psalm 19:8, 10, 12-14; James 5:1-6; Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

A brief background of the first reading will help us appreciate the message the reading has for us. At a point on their journey, the Israelites complained bitterly against God and Moses: "But now we are famished; we have nothing to look forward to but this manna ..." "When Moses heard the people, family after family, crying at the entrance of their tents, so that the Lord became very angry, he was grieved." Moses cried to God, "... I cannot carry all this people by myself, for they are too heavy for me. If this is the way you will deal with me, then please do me the favor of killing me at once, so that I need no longer face my distress" (Numbers 11:1-15).

Then, God directed Moses to appoint seventy elders of Israel. God said to Moses, "I will also take some of the spirit that is on you and will confer it on them, that they may share the burden of the people with you. You will then not have to bear it by yourself" (Numbers 11:16-17).

In the first reading, God took some of the spirit that was on Moses and bestowed on sixty-eight elders who were gathered, and they prophesied. Two elders, Eldad and Medad "were not in the gathering but had been left in the camp.... Yet, the spirit came upon them also, and they prophesied in the camp" (Numbers 11:24-26). Joshua objected, "Moses, my Lord, stop them." Moses refused and replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets! Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit on them all" (Numbers 11:27-29).

In the gospel, John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us." Jesus replied, "Do not prevent him..."

Unfortunately, there are 'Joshuas' and 'Johns' almost everywhere who hold on to philosophies of exclusivity and entitlement who insist and deny those who do not belong to them or belong to their group equal rights and privileges. These attitudes are ungodly.

Also, God can choose anyone according to his good purpose. If God chooses someone I do not like, or chooses my enemy, or someone outside my group for his good purpose, then, so be it. I must not go to every possible extent and use every possible weapon to stop God's plan. Let us not have a discouraging spirit or jealous spirit that tries to stifle God's plan. In 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 St. Paul writes, "Do not quench the Holy Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances." The Holy Spirit blows wherever he wills and uses whoever he wishes (John 3:8).

In today's gospel, Jesus strongly condemns all forms of abuse and molestation of children and minors. He says, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea" (Mark 9:42). In the same vein, whoever causes hardship on the vulnerable, the voiceless, the powerless, and the defenseless, "it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea."

The entire second reading condemns those who take advantage of others to advance themselves or enrich themselves. "... You have stored up treasure for the last days. Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers who harvested your fields are crying aloud, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.... You have condemned; you have murdered the righteous one; he offers you no resistance" (James 5:3-6). Helplessly, we watch these sins committed around us, and in many places and in many countries.

For this reason, St. Paul invites us, "First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions... for kings and for all in authority, that [they] may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our savior..." (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

To conclude, Jesus has something for each one of us to reflect on. Jesus advises us to cut off hand, cut off feet, and pluck off eye if they cause us to sin. We know how important and dear these parts of the body are to us. It means that we must cut off from persons, relationships, associations, occasions, places, and the things we may hold dear but they lead us astray or lead us to sin. Such daring and radical action requires a lot of discipline and sacrifice which we can only undertake by God's grace. Let us pray for the grace.

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