

Homily of Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, 2024

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 present, and they prophesied. Two elders "were not in the gathering but... in the camp.... Yet, the spirit came upon them also, and they prophesied in the camp" (Numbers 11:24-26).

I do not stop wondering why God did not confer the spirit on the elders directly from himself. Rather, he took some of the spirit that was on Moses and conferred on the elders. In my wondering, I ask myself: "Do I have the spirit that God can take some and confer on others?" "What can God take from me and give to others which can positively impact their life?" "Can I dispose myself for God to take from me and give to others or do I, jealously, hold all that I have to myself?" After God had taken some spirit from Moses and conferred on others, Moses still had enough spirit to continue to lead the people of Israel. Givers never lack (Proverbs 28:27).

Joshua did not want the two men who were absent from the gathering to receive the spirit. Joshua said, "Moses, my lord, stop them." In today's gospel, John and some of the disciples of Jesus tried to stop someone who was driving out demons in the name of Jesus because he was not a disciple of Jesus.

In the same way, there are people who hold on to concepts of exclusion and entitlement and deny those who do not belong to their kind or group their deserved rights and privileges. St. Paul scolded the Corinthians, "One says, 'I belong to Paul.' Another says, 'I belong to Apollos.' Does not that show that you have the spirit of this world?" (1 Corinthians 3:4). While the spirit of this world is partial and factional, the Spirit of God has no boundaries. It blows wherever he wishes (John 3:8).

Also, God can choose and use anyone according to his good purpose. If God chooses and uses someone we do not like, or our enemy, or someone outside our group for his good purpose, then, so be it. Let us not have the spirit of this world that tries to stifle God's Spirit and God's plan. St. Paul encourages us, "Do not quench the Holy Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances" (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

In today's gospel, Jesus strongly condemns all forms of abuse and molesting 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, as we reflected last Sunday, God is displeased with whoever causes hardship on the vulnerable, the voiceless, the powerless, and the defenseless.

The entire second reading condemns those who take advantage of the vulnerable, the voiceless, the powerless, and the defenseless to advance 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 see these sins committed around us and around the world. For this reason, St. Paul urges us to offer supplications, prayers, petitions for rulers, and for all in authority, that they may lead with integrity (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

To conclude, Jesus has something for each one of us to reflect and work on. Jesus advises us to cut off hand or 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 and away from God. Such daring and radical action requires a lot of prayer, courage, discipline, resilience, sacrifice, and God's grace.

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