



This year's theme for the Season of Creation (September 1-October 4) is also our parish message for the month of September: A Home for All. We want people to experience our church "home" as an outpost of "radical" welcome – where they know they are a loved child of God. We want to extend that same care to our common "home" so that all can share in the gifts of our Creator.

In the first three weeks we looked at the call of disciples to "radical" hospitality, "radical" servitude and "radical" humility – and this week a "radical" tolerance, a deeper humility, a greater openness to the surprising movement of the Spirit, even to those who are not like us.

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
September 26, 2021

The Gospel of Mark

At that time, 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. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us. Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward. "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. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'"

SCRIPTURES

Numbers 11:25-29

Ps. 19:8-14

James 5:1-6

Mark 9:38-43, 45,
47-48

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

1. Two men in Numbers did not appear to be worthy messengers of God. Moses warns that mere humans cannot judge whether or not a person possesses God's grace. In our readings this Sunday, both Jesus and Moses condemn intolerance as restricting the way God can work. Can you name some instances where the Spirit is at work in people that we may not see or notice?
2. We could only surmise what were in the minds of the disciples. Were they jealous because the man could also cast demons though he was not one of them? Were they angry because they have assumed that the power to exorcise demons was a privilege given only to the followers of Jesus and not to any other person? {Even from James – the hunger to be better than the other; or trying to question or control God's generosity}
3. This Sunday's readings may be a good time to ask ourselves: do we cause any of the "little ones" to stray from Jesus? Consider: We may not be deliberately inviting another person to stray. However, we may subtly or unknowingly invite another to do so. We may be talking with someone and we begin to gossip. Or perhaps we are complaining about work, co-workers, or the behavior of our children, or perhaps we simply are in a bad mood.
4. Do you agree: Whoever is not against us is for us?

What makes our parish A HOME FOR ALL?

In Mark's passage, the disciples found someone acting in Jesus' name without proper authorization. They tell the man to stop, then they report the incident to Jesus. Maybe they were expecting Jesus to congratulate them on their conscientiousness, but Jesus responded in a way that they didn't expect. Jesus instructed His disciples not to stop anyone from acting in His name even if they didn't have the proper credentials.

Look deeper: "We tried to stop him, because he was not following us." That last word is the giveaway sign of an all-too-familiar problem. It's the divisiveness that splits us into "Us" and "Them." "We" are the approved insiders. "They" are the uncredentialed outsiders. They have no place in our club. This is Members Only. The same could be said of Moses and the first reading.

- Do we ever notice such behavior – especially when it sneaks into our own thinking? Do we ever get a bit elitist about our own church or denomination or theology or way of doing things to the detriment of other people and other ways?
- So the first step is to notice, but the second is to deal with it. How do you do that? Discuss and share your own encounters, how hard it is to be open to others, as we read below:

Poet Edwin Markham wrote "Outwitted" which suggests: "He drew a circle that shut me out-Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But love and I had the wit to win: **We drew a circle and took him in.**"

This is the spirit of Jesus, as it is shown in this verse. It is wide, tolerant and merciful. Love believes the best of people and makes the choice to build bridges and not walls, to open doors, not put on locks; to open wide the tent, to make a home for all, where all are welcome – and there you will find, God also dwells.

"A HOME FOR ALL" SEPTEMBER PRAYER, from SeasonofCreation.org

Heavenly Father, Creator of All: Give us faith to follow Christ to our just place in our beloved community. Enlighten us with the grace to answer your call to care for our common home. Send your Holy Spirit to guide us to renew the face of your Earth. Gladden our hearts as we work to create a joyful home for all. We ask this in the name of the One who came to proclaim good news to all creation, Jesus Christ. AMEN