

Weekend Readings & Reflections

September 25-26, 2021 – Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection: Today's Gospel begins with a scene that recalls a similar moment in the history of Israel, the episode recalled in today's First Reading. The seventy elders who receive God's Spirit through Moses prefigure the ministry of the Apostles. Like Joshua in the First Reading, John makes the mistake of presuming that only a select few are inspired and entrusted to carry out God's plans. The Spirit blows where it wills (see [John 3:8](#)), and God desires to bestow His Spirit on all the people of God in every nation under heaven (see [Acts 2:5, 38](#)). God can and will work mighty deeds through the most unexpected and unlikely people. All of us are called to perform even our most humble tasks, such as giving a cup of water, for the sake of His name and the cause of His kingdom. John believes he is protecting the purity of the Lord's name. But, really, he's only guarding his own privilege and status. It's telling that the Apostles want to shut down the ministry of an exorcist. Authority to drive out demons and unclean spirits was one of the specific powers entrusted to the Twelve (see [Mark 3:14-15; 6:7, 13](#)). Cleanse me from my unknown faults, we pray in today's Psalm. Often, like Joshua and John, perhaps without noticing it, we cloak our failings and fears under the guise of our desire to defend Christ or the Church. But as Jesus says today, instead of worrying about who is a real Christian and who is not, we should make sure that we ourselves are leading lives worthy of our calling as disciples (see [Ephesians 1:4](#)). Does the advice we give, or the example of our actions, give scandal—causing others to doubt or lose faith? Do we do what we do with mixed motives instead of seeking only the Father's will? Are we living, as this Sunday's Epistle warns, for our own luxury and pleasure while neglecting our neighbors? We need to keep meditating on His Law, as we sing in today's Psalm. We need to pray for the grace to detect our failings and to overcome them.

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome to our study for the Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Let us begin in prayer:

All: Pierce, O most sweet Lord Jesus, my inmost soul with the most joyous and healthful wound of Thy love, and with true calm and most holy apostolic charity, that my soul may ever languish and melt with entire love and longing for Thee. May my heart ever hunger after and feed upon Thee, Whom the angels desire to look upon, and may my inmost soul be filled with the sweetness of Thy savor; may it ever thirst for Thee, the fountain of life, the fountain of wisdom and knowledge, the fountain of eternal light, the torrent of pleasure, the fullness of the house of God. And be Thou alone ever my hope, my entire confidence, my riches, my delight, my pleasure, my joy, my rest and tranquility, my peace, my sweetness, my food, my refreshment, my refuge, my help, my wisdom, my portion, my possession, my treasure; in Whom may my mind and my heart be ever fixed and firm and rooted immovably. Amen. (from the Prayer of St. Bonaventure)

Leader: *In a relativistic world that is obsessed with not seeking truth, Christianity can either be hugely offensive or be a great relief. It takes a lot of courage to tell someone that there is objective truth, which is true for everyone. But if we truly believe in Jesus and have experienced his healing mercy, we must let our hearts be moved with compassion so that you can bring him to others. We have to work to not see Christianity as the world does – offensive, oppressive, bigoted, or proud – but as merciful and true. If we really believe in Jesus, then we must believe that those who do not know him yet are longing for him in the secret places in their heart, in which they do not even know of yet.*

The Four Marks of the Catholic Church

The *Catechism* teaches us that there are four marks of the Church that we profess in the Creed – one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The Church has these marks because she belongs to Christ. Indeed, it is “through the Holy Spirit [that he] makes his Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, and it is he who calls her to realize each of these qualities” (CCC, art. 256).

These characteristics support the Church's mission of evangelization. Her oneness, her holiness, her catholicity (or universality), and her apostolic character all drive her to draw all people to herself to be in the one Body of Christ and to have the means of obtaining salvation through the sacraments.

(Play the video on [FORMED.org](#) - [Opening the Word – 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time \(Year B\)](#))

FIRST READING ~ Numbers 11:25-29 ~

The LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to Moses. Taking some of the spirit that was on Moses, the LORD bestowed it on the seventy elders; and as the spirit came to rest on them, they prophesied. Now two men, one named Eldad and the other Medad, were not in the gathering but had been left in the camp. They too had been on the list, but had not gone out to the tent; yet the spirit came to rest on them also, and they prophesied in the camp. So, when a young man quickly told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp," Joshua, son of Nun, who from his youth had been Moses' aide, said, "Moses, my lord, stop them." But Moses answered him, "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!"

Like the Book of Exodus, the Book of Numbers is filled with God's people complaining of life in the desert. Moses finds the experience of leadership so heavy he wishes God would allow him to die rather than carry such a heavy burden. In prayer Moses is invited to share leadership with 70 others.

- *Have you had an experience of feeling 'heavy' and 'tired' with responsibilities and complaints? What happened? Do you have the freedom to let go, share responsibilities, or admit you are in need of help?*

Joshua, the 'leader in training' was jealous and protective of power and authority. Moses shares a new vision with him - wouldn't it be great if everyone was attentive to God and spoke of God's will and lived out their responsibilities and leadership gifts.

- *Do you see people as problems needing correction, or, people gifted needing motivation?*

SECOND READING ~ James 5:1-6 ~

Come now, you rich, weep and wail over your impending miseries. Your wealth has rotted away, your clothes have become moth-eaten, your gold and silver have corroded, and that corrosion will be a testimony against you; it will devour your flesh like a fire. 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 lived on earth in luxury and pleasure; you have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter. You have condemned; you have murdered the righteous one; he offers you no resistance.

James warns of the storing up of wealth. St Basil gives a colorful reflection: If everyone kept only what is necessary for ordinary needs and left the surplus to the poor, wealth and poverty would be abolished.... Are you not a thief? The bread you store belongs to the hungry. The cloak kept in your closet belongs to those who lack clothing. The money you keep hidden away belongs to the needy. ...Thus you oppress as many people as you are in a position to help.

- *Have you ever reflected upon what your ordinary needs are, and how much surplus you have? Do you give to the needs of the poor?*



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.'"

John is jealous that an outsider of the disciples group is obviously sharing in the power and authority of Jesus. 'He does not follow us'. He is not in our group. John's comments reveal their misunderstanding of the Kingdom of God. They still think of it as a power structure of a political kingdom with favors granted to a small group.

- *Have you prevented or excluded someone from service, ministry, a job, because they did not 'follow' you? Jesus uses striking imagery to warn about being a scandal - obstacle to someone believing in Jesus. Cut off or out anything that could stop people following Jesus.*
- *What do you consider are obstacles for people coming to faith in Jesus and participating in the life of the Church? Does your life display a desire for wealth or the poor? Comfort or compassion? Arrogance or understanding? What do you need to cut off from your life?*

Gehenna is a place just outside of Jerusalem. Historically it was where shameful sacrifices of children were offered to the Canannite god 'Molech'. It was then regarded as an unclean and sinful place. It became a rubbish tip with constantly burning fires. Jesus uses it as a symbol of Hell. Uncomfortably, the issue of a final judgment and consequences of our life-style and actions is raised.

- *Do I give a good or bad example of Christian living? Have I caused anyone to stumble in their relationship with God? How do I understand God as merciful yet also having a day of judgement?*
- *Do you believe that the Catholic Faith is the one true Faith? Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the one Truth for which all humans long? Do you see yourself as a missionary of the Catholic Church? What are some fears that keep you from sharing what you believe with others who might believe differently?*

MEDITATION

Do you rejoice in the good that others do? Jesus reprimands his disciples for their jealousy and suspicion. They were upset that someone who was not of their company was performing a good work in the name of Jesus. They even "forbade" the man "because he was not following us". Jesus' reply is filled with wisdom: "No one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me." Are we not like the disciples when we get upset at the good deeds of others who seem to shine

more than us? Paul says that "love is not jealous... but rejoices in the right" (1 Corinthians 13:4,6).

Envy and jealousy, its counterpart, are sinful because they lead us to sorrow over what should make us rejoice - namely, our neighbor's good. The reason we may grieve over another's good is that somehow we see that good as lessening our own value or excellence. Envy forms when we believe that the other person's advantage or possession diminishes or brings disgrace on us. Envy is contrary to love.

How can we overcome envy? With the love that God has put into our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). The Holy Spirit purifies our heart and frees us from our disordered passions, such as envy, jealousy, greed, and bitterness. God's love is a generous and selfless love which is wholly oriented towards our good. The love that God places in our hearts seeks the highest good of our neighbor. God's love purifies and frees us from all envy and jealousy - and it compels us to give generously, especially to those who lack what they need.

We have been given the greatest of rewards - God himself who is perfect love and source of abundant life and unending happiness. Paul the Apostle tells us that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5). God's love purifies our hearts and compels us to express kindness and charity towards our neighbor who is created in the image and likeness of God. We were created in love for love. The charity we show to our neighbors in their need expresses the gratitude we have for the abundant goodness and kindness of God towards us. Jesus declared that any kindness shown and any help given to the people of Christ will not lose its reward. Jesus never refused to give to anyone in need who asked for his help. As his disciples we are called to be kind and generous as he is.

Jesus set before his disciples the one supreme goal in life that is worth any sacrifice, and that goal is God himself and his will for our lives which leads to everlasting peace and happiness. Just as a doctor might remove a limb or some part of the body in order to preserve the life of the whole body, so we must be ready to part with anything that causes us to sin and which leads to spiritual death.

- *Do you set a good example for others to follow, especially the young?*
- *Do you rejoice in the good that others do? Or do I find myself envious of their goodness?*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing, let us pray ...

ALL: Lord Jesus, fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may radiate the joy of the Gospel to others. May your light and truth shine through me that others may find new life and joy in you, and freedom from sin and oppression. Amen.

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

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