

Reflection for the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time

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." Mark 9:38

This statement by St. John the Apostle is the opportunity for Jesus to share a three-fold message. Each part of this three-part message can stand on its own and has volumes to share. St. John the youngest of the 12 Apostles comes across a person that is driving out demons in the name of Jesus Christ. The reaction of the Apostle John to seeing this miracle is to try to stop the man from driving out demons in the name of Jesus Christ, because this man is not a part of their company. St. John then finds Jesus to inform Him of what has transpired, this is where it gets interesting for Jesus does not say to St. John, "well done good and faithful servant," rather Jesus says, "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." This quote from Jesus found in the Gospel of Mark chapter 9 verse 39 has a deep meaning and message that can and should challenge the followers of Jesus Christ to this very day.

Jesus when He spoke to His Apostle John about the man that was driving out demons in His name provides a three-fold message, and the first part of this three-fold message is that if they are not against us, they are with us. St. John saw an issue with the man driving out demons in the name of Jesus Christ, because he was not one of the 12 and one can assume that he was not someone that was a well-known follower of Jesus. But this man had clearly heard the message of Jesus Christ and found himself called to heal in His name.

From this account we see even in the first century of Christianity how chaotic and unorganized our faith can appear. For by the account of John the Apostle there is a person who is not apart of the group driving out demons in the name of Jesus Christ, and when this is pointed out to Jesus, He is comfortable with this taking place and even informs St. John that he should not interfere with what this man is doing. St. John seems to be seeking order and organization and Jesus appears ready to accept the opposite.

Today as we look at Christianity, we can see many denominations and many issues that separate these denominations. In fact, we can look within many of these denominations and see issues that creates separations in the denomination. Even within the Catholic Church today we can see issues of theology, liturgy, and dogma that appear to be creating separations within our beloved Church. This appears to be normal for we can look at the two-thousand-year history of our faith and from one century to the next there have been issues that have divided us. So, we hear Jesus informing St. John in our Gospel reading this Sunday that "whoever is not against us is for us." Maybe what Jesus was saying to the Apostle John all those years ago is what He is saying to us today and that is we need to focus on what unites us and not what divides us. Of course, as Catholics, as we look for what unites us with other Christians, we must stay true to the Tenets of our Catholic Faith.

Jesus' message is more than a call for unity, for in our second part of our three-fold message Jesus states "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." This protective statement from Jesus is found in verse 42 of our Gospel reading this Sunday. The second part of our three-fold message this Sunday is that we who chose to follow Christ and share the "Good News" have a responsibility to all who we share this "Good News" with. Yes, we are many parts, but we are all a part of the one body, and our actions and deeds must help bring each other closer to Christ.

The third part of the three-fold message we have this Sunday is Jesus after He reminds us to look out for each other, He then states "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, in the unquenchable fire." This verse 43 of chapter 9 in the Gospel of Mark, gives us a clear message that Jesus expects us to work on the problems and issues that we have in our lives. Yes, we do have a loving and forgiving Lord that meets us where we are at, but He expects each one of us to work to overcome the challenges and issues that we have in our personal lives.

In closing may we all hear our Gospel reading this Sunday reminding us that, though we are many parts and very different from each other in many ways, we are one body, we are the Church that Jesus founded. It was Jesus Christ that also promised that the gates of hell would never prevail against the Church. May our Community be a light and example of what it means to be a part of the one body, working together to walk with Christ in this world and in the next.