

September 29, 2024
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

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.'"

Background:

This gospel text follows the Gospel from last Sunday, where Jesus confronted the disciples who had been arguing about which of them was the most important among them. In response, Jesus told them that those who desire to be first must be servants of all.

The gospel begins with the apostle John raising questions about discipleship. In their culture, it was important for the disciples to have a sense of belonging and a strong sense of connection with Jesus, their leader. For anyone not of their group to be using the name of Jesus to expel evil spirits would threaten their sense of belonging. This would be added to the uncertainty raised a few verses prior to this, when they were asked to expel a demon from a boy but were unable to do so (Mark 9:14-19). Jesus' response to his disciples is counter to the values of their culture. He simply lets the disciples know that their need to have an insider or exclusive relationship with him is not a value he shares. It is more important that the work of God be done, rather than who is doing it. Jesus stresses the point by saying God will recognize anyone who so much as gives another a glass of water. It would be helpful to hear this statement in its context, mindful that giving another a glass of water in Jesus' day was more difficult and more significant than most westerners would experience.

The second part of this gospel also addresses the sense that the disciples have exclusive access to Jesus or God. Jesus instructs them that God cares for even the little ones--not just children, but all those who seem unimportant. While these little ones, like children of the day, may appear to be insignificant and even expendable to most people, in the eyes of God they are of great importance. They are so important that if anyone would be a source of scandal to any of them, it would be better that a millstone be placed about their neck and they be thrown into the sea to drown. This was a particularly humiliating form of execution because it typically was used by the Romans.

In the remaining verses of this text Jesus describes other forms of restraint for those who find themselves being led into sin. Most who hear this gospel find the idea of cutting off one's hand or plucking out an eye as extreme. But those who Jesus is addressing would not be shocked. Such punishments were not uncommon, but they also carried severe consequences. These punishment guidelines, while extreme, were meant to limit the extent that a person might go in retaliation for some crime or injustice done to them. People without limbs or sight did not have access to modern forms of assistance as some do today. Without fully functioning bodies, people became isolated and lived desperate lives. In the context of this culture, Jesus seems to be trying to make a point about the seriousness of being the cause for another to sin.

Reflection Questions:

1. Are there people in your life who make you feel special? Who are the people you strive to make feel special? How would your life be different without those people?
2. Do you feel like you are part of God's inner circle? Would you like to be?
3. If you were commissioning an artist to paint this gospel scene, what would you ask the artist to include: the expressions of John's face, Jesus's face, their posture, the surroundings, other people overhearing the conversation, or those paying no attention at all? Where would you put yourself in the painting?
4. How do you respond within yourself as you hear Jesus speak about the one who causes one of the little ones to sin?
5. Jesus seems to be asking his followers to take seriously those things that cause them to sin. Can you take some time to talk with God about why God takes those things so seriously?
6. Can you also take some time to talk with God about your relationship to "little ones?"

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for September 29, 2024, the Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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!"

The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart. The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul; the decree of the Lord is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true, all of them just. Though your servant is careful of them, very diligent in keeping them, yet who can detect failings? Cleanse me from my unknown faults! From wanton sin especially, restrain your servant; let it not rule over me. Then shall I be blameless and innocent of serious sin.

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.

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 enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna."

Excerpts from Numbers 11:25-29; Psalm 19:8-14; James 5:1-6; and Mark 9:38-43-48

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for September 29th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the opening part of the gospel from Mark, Jesus responds when he is told of someone (not among the disciples) who is driving out demons in Jesus' name. He tells the disciples, "Do not prevent him. No one who performs a mighty deed in my name can at the same time speak ill of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will surely not lose his reward." He also tells them, "Whoever causes one who believes in me to sin, it would be better for him if he were thrown into the sea. If your hand, or your foot, or your eye causes you to sin, cut it off, pluck it out. Better to enter into the kingdom of God with only one of these than to go into the unquenchable fire of Gehenna with two."

The other readings also have references to outsiders receiving the spirit, the law of the Lord being just, the pointlessness of stored-up wealth, and restraint from sin. In the first reading, from Numbers, when seventy gathered elders receive the spirit all at one time, it also comes upon two remaining elders who are not with the rest at the time. Moses reacts, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets! Would that he might bestow his spirit on them all!" Psalm 19 declares, "The decree of the Lord is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple. Cleanse me from my faults! From sin restrain your servant; let it not rule over me." In the second reading, from the letter of James, he writes, "Come now, you rich, your wealth has rotted away, your gold and silver have corroded, and that corrosion will devour your flesh like a fire."

Jesus has lessons in this gospel about how to be good, and also what to do about it if we haven't been good and are still inclined not to be good. Doing the good has favorable results. Doing the not-good has significant consequences if it is not curbed. We are reminded to not stand in the way of any believers and their faith in God and their acceptance of his welcome.

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!