



26th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Date: Sunday, September 30, 2018 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** B

First Reading: Numbers 11:25–29

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 19:8, 10, 12–14 | **Response:** Psalm 19:9ab

Second Reading: James 5:1–6

Gospel Acclamation: John 17:17ab

Gospel Reading: Mark 9:38–43, 45, 47–48

Preached at: the Carmelite Monastery of Sr Thérèse in Benoni in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Our readings this morning talk of prophecy, God’s faithfulness and the importance of our faith.

Our first reading is trying to remind us that our leaders should never lack the gift of prophecy. Whether they exercise it or not is the real question. The reading tries to show us that God does not act through just one ruler or prophet, but bestows his grace widely and generously. In saying that it was bestowed on 70 elders, we’re told by those who know these things, that 70 is the number symbolizing totality. Thus, God’s grace can be bestowed on whomever God chooses. In fact, we heard in the first reading that God bestowed his Spirit on Eldad and Medad who were not even present at the miracle when the Lord spoke to Moses in the tent. So, the first lesson I’d like to suggest to you all that we could take away from this morning’s readings is that we should celebrate the diverse gifts and charisms of all people in the church – because God blesses indiscriminately, and certainly does not restrict his friendship and grace to the institutional leaders, clergy and religious. This is in fact good news, but it requires that we open ourselves to identifying, nurturing and promoting God’s gifts in all God’s people, men and women, young and old, straight and gay, because these are distinctions that are neither made nor noticed by God.

Our responsorial psalm is from Psalm 19, a psalm that begins that ‘the heavens are telling the glory of God’, but we come to it in the middle when it is talking about the beauty of God’s law. If God pours out his Spirit and his grace on the Community, we must see the beauty in our faith which is constructed from the

Law. Essentially, all is gift, and we should be grateful and consider that our true inheritance or wealth is from our faith, or our relationship with God, which is what is continued in our second reading.

Here James echoes Jesus who has warned in his various parables about the fleeting value of riches. In fact if you want to hear a good summary of Jesus' teachings, the Letter to James is a good short summary. Although it's often associated with privileging works over faith, it certainly has a lot to say about Faith too – and today we hear how we should treasure it because through the eye of faith we are able to discern the gifts God has given us and so remain grateful. In the end, faith is the only valuable asset we have – everything else will rust or be destroyed, but our faith, like the law, revives the spirit and connects us to that one, enduring and eternal relationship.

Finally, in our Gospel, we see Jesus warning the disciples to not think they are the sole agents of God's grace. In fact, if the history of the Church has taught us anything, it would be to realize that the Church is larger than we ever imagined and that God's grace cannot be contained. It is overflowing and it is found in the unlikeliest of places. Here in this Gospel Jesus is portrayed as the new Moses. He is the fulfilment of prophecy and the perfection of the law. Jesus' Good News is inclusive. Whereas in the first reading the criterion to be a recipient of God's grace was to be an elder, for Jesus it is one who treats the least with justice and respect, even if only by offering them a cup of water, this is the way that Jesus treats people. Jesus also tells us the corollary to that condition, that those who use Jesus' name while committing sin and leading others to ruin will be punished.

Ultimately, we are faced today with a choice, to favour faith, i.e. the call of Christ to us to be holy and to trust in his promises rather than to put our trust in the riches that are fleeting and less valuable than our faith. We should show our love in concrete ways by offering water to the thirsty, working for justice and to exercise God's gifts, especially that of prophecy. How sorely needed these gifts are in our world today that is riddled with the temptation towards being corrupt. In fact, the Gospel says it is better for us to cut off our hands or feet if they lead us astray. I do not think this was meant literally but the decision to choose life over death, wisdom over wickedness, obedience over disobedience, being in love over not loving, acting with integrity and honesty over corruption, all these decisions are made the more urgent.

But what do we do in our time today where we have seen faith leaders lead the sheep astray, or for those we know and love who have no time for faith, not for any fault of their own, but because they cannot perceive the inherent value in it?

Perhaps this is a moment in the Church where the laity need to recall and exercise their baptismal gifts and the 'institutional church' needs to step back and once again recognize that God's grace can be found in the unlikeliest of places and will not be constrained too narrowly. We need friends and family members to speak openly of their faith and how it has helped them. We need also to hear how they been hurt and scandalized, because only the Truth will set us free. But what we do not need is for a narrowness or exclusive vision of the church to return, because that would be to blind us of what God's grace is doing in our world today, and has been doing since the 2nd Vatican Council. And at this moment in our history, I do believe it is challenging clericalism and calling for a greater transparency at all levels.

If you are not against us, then you are for us, went the Gospel. We need to reach out to those unlikely people, perhaps outside the Catholic Church – perhaps within our own families and friendship circles, and see and listen to how God is working in their lives. We need to pay more attention to the experience of people of faith. We need to pray for a conversion of our leaders and our Church so that it might weather this current storm. We need to put our faith in Jesus because he never disappoints. Once we rely more on God than on ourselves, we will know what it is trust that God will never abandon his people.

Let us pray this morning for the grace and courage to do this, and to see God in all things – all the beautiful and wonderful things he has created, and he created as good. Let us rejoice in that fact and not forget it, and let us remember that faith – true faith – needs only to be proposed – it never needs to be imposed by force.

Let us also pray this morning, for all the victims of abuse, whether of conscience, power or sexual abuse, for the ongoing reform of our Church structures so that, truly converted, we might better lead all people to a deeper faith and trust in the Lord and together build a church that is more attuned to Christ, less clerical and powerful and more trusting in God's gifts and providence.

Amen.

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