

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
(Numbers 11:25-29 / Mark 9:38-43.45.47-48)
27.09.2015

Dear brothers and sisters,

We all want to be disciples of Jesus-Christ, we all want to follow Jesus-Christ, but we don't always know how to do it. We think that we are doing the right thing when in fact we are not living in accord with the Lord's will. So we need Jesus' help to teach us how to become a true disciple. Today's gospel passage contains a few insights on that matter.

The example of the "strange exorcist", who was not one of the community of the disciples of Jesus but who cast out devils in His name, is very instructive. Jesus' disciples wanted to stop this strange exorcist because he was not "**one of them**"; but Jesus reacted immediately and firmly: "You must not stop him: no one who works a miracle in my name is likely to speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us". The message is clear: Jesus' power transcends the circle of his community. Jesus acts not only in his community but also beyond his community. We cannot encapsulate Jesus' action in a community, even in our community. Jesus is always greater. Jesus is the Lord, the Lord of our community, but also and above all the Lord of the universe, the King of the universe.

Here in Northern Ireland, it is very important to meditate upon this point. When we speak, we say so easily (and if we don't say it, we think it secretly within ourselves): "**He is one of us**", or "**she is not one of us, you know**", meaning that he is from the same Christian denomination as ours, or that she is not from the same political party as ours. We use the same expression – he is not one of us – when we speak of someone who belongs to another GAA team than our own... and this is no joke, here in Ireland, believe me!

These little words "one of us", "not one of us" are not neutral, harmless, or innocuous, far from it. Jesus knew that, and it is for this reason that, in this teaching, He puts us on our guard against all parochialism. Jesus is not a prisoner of our particular Christian community. He acts in our community and also in all the other Christian communities. Jesus puts us on our guard against all exclusiveness, all sectarianism. A Christian community is not a self-sufficient private club. A Christian community is part of a network, a network made of all the Christian communities. We cannot ignore them; but even more than that, we need them to enrich our knowledge of Christ and our spiritual life; we need them to become a true disciple.

What is true of our Christian communities is also true of our political parties. We need to belong to a political party. We cannot live isolated, without solidarities. But there is not one political party which incarnates all the gospel values, not one which can claim to be "the" Christian political party. Each party has its strong points and its weaknesses. Christ works in our own political party and also in all the others. Christ and his gospel are there to challenge the principles of all our political parties.

The right attitude of a disciple of Jesus or a Christian community is not: "Our way, no way". The Christian attitude is not black or white. The Christian attitude is not that we are getting all things

right and the others are getting all things wrong. On the contrary, Jesus calls us to be open to those from other Christian denominations, even from other faiths, and those from other political parties, to listen to them with a positive attitude, to be tolerant toward them. Christ is present and acting in each one of them. There is some truth in each one of them.

This does not mean that all Christian communities, all faiths, all political parties are the same. They are all different with their riches and their weaknesses. Most of the time, our membership has been transmitted to us by our families; sometimes we have chosen them. But the point for us is to realize that we don't follow a community or a party, but a person, Christ. We need a religious community with a particular tradition, but, in that community and with the help of this community, we follow Christ. In today's gospel passage, it is significant that the disciples saw a man who was not one of them, one of their community. Their reference was the community. And Jesus replies: "no one who works a miracle in my name is likely to speak evil of me". Jesus declares himself to be the reference. For a Christian, the reference should always be Jesus and not a community or a party.

The truth is that we belong to Christ before belonging to any community. We were created by God in Christ. Our relationship with Christ should be normative, and a challenge for all the communities to which we belong.

The truth is not in the words: "**he is one of us**" or "**she is not one of us**". The truth is that Christ is present in every human being who was created in his image, whatever be his religious community or her party. The disciple seeks God and finds him not only in his community but also beyond and even far beyond his community. Far from being exclusive in his community or in his political party, the disciple of Jesus is called to become more and more inclusive.

Today's gospel passage teaches us also that the disciple of Jesus is not someone who does great things, but someone who serves his brothers and sisters in humanity. The disciple of Jesus tries to recognize the Lord's presence in every human being, especially in those who are without power or status, in the little ones, in those who live on the margins of our societies, in the migrants who flee their country to save their lives from injustice, violence and death. In so doing, the disciples do great things according to the values of the kingdom of God. All these little ones were created by God in his image and belong to him. To give them a glass of water is to give a glass of water to the Lord, it is to honour the Lord. It is to bear witness to the Lord's love for the world. It is to be a true disciple of the Lord. As we try to follow Christ, if we want to do great things, we have to do small things well and for the right reasons.

The disciple of Jesus must also do all he can to avoid to be an obstacle for others who have faith and seek to enter into the Kingdom of God. We are an obstacle when we intervene in the relationship between the Lord and each one of his creatures, ourselves included, and take the place of God. On the Christian way, Jesus invites us to a real radicalism: cut your hand, cut your foot, or tear your eye out... in order to enter into the kingdom of God. It would be better for us to be drowned out than to bring down one of these little ones.

Very often we are an obstacle for others and for ourselves by the words we say, drawing our attention and the attention of others to ourselves instead of keeping our eyes and the eyes of others fixed upon the Lord. When we do this, we separate ourselves and others from the Lord.

We are a stumbling block on other peoples' way and on our own way too. We distance ourselves from the kingdom of God. We stop being a disciple and hinder others from being a disciple, because to be a disciple is to be a follower of Christ.

The message of today's gospel for the disciples whom we strive to be is to come back to the Lord incessantly and keep our eyes fixed upon Him. The Lord should always be our ultimate reference, the one to whom we belong, the one who challenges our religious communities, our political parties and other associations, the one with whom we make our choices and take our decisions. The truth is that Jesus is the Lord, the one Lord, amen!