

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)  
(Jeremiah 1:4-5.17-19 / Luke 4:21-30)  
03.02.2019  
*Me First & Me Only Movements*

We have all heard about the positive Me Too movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault. In the Gospels there are two Me movements that Jesus challenges quite explicitly.

There is the Me First movement. It is best illustrated by the Pharisees who think that they will be the first to enter into the Kingdom of God. The Me First movement is rooted in a certain sense of superiority. Because one has a particular political or ecclesiastical status, because one has money or power, because one is especially observant in matters of religion, he or she is considered to be above others. In this mentality, there is a clear hierarchy on earth which foretells that of heaven.

To the Pharisees, Jesus declares bluntly: “The last will be first, and the first will be last” (Mt 20:16). In case they would not have understood, he adds: “Truly I tell you, the tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you” (Mt 21:31). Here Jesus starts a great religious revolution by telling us that on our way to God, we cannot progress in pushing and shoving others. We will not get to the top of the ladder by elbowing out our brothers and sisters along the way but rather by loving and serving them. St Paul’s words should be our rule of life: “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others” (Phil 2:4), “outdo one another in showing honour.” (Rm 12:10)

In the political arena, the Me First movement is particularly active in our days, it is a form of collective individualism. America First is a slogan dear to Mr Trump and Brexit is nothing other than a Great Britain First.

The Me First movement is often coupled with another movement which is described in our Gospel reading today: the Me Only movement.

St Luke describes an episode which must have been particularly hurtful for Jesus. The people from his own home town wanted to kill him because he dared to remind them that, in time past, God chose to bless a Sidonian woman and a Syrian man instead of a member of the people of Israel. It is an earthquake in the religious psyche of these men and women: their God is not theirs alone, he does not belong to them only, and he is not constrained by his covenant with them. This is a huge blow to their Me Only movement.

The Me Only movement is particularly common among religious people. It is the religion of an exclusive God for an exclusive people. We must admit that there is something comforting in the idea that what God does for me or for my Church, he does only for me or for us and he does not do it for others, those who do not belong to the pack of which I am part. It is good to feel that we are special, not only the first but also the only ones who are right and who really matter. But this creates a very small God.

Generally this attitude tends to impose its views, its rules on everybody. Members of the Me Only movement believe that their way is God’s way, so if others do not follow that way then they are doomed. Let me give you three examples: in the past year, I have been declared an heretic by an Orthodox priest because, according to him, as a Catholic I worship Mary; I have been told that I am not saved by a Protestant because I do use the King James Version of the Bible and I have been accused of not being a true Catholic because here at the

Monastery we do not require from the faithful to kneel and to receive communion on the tongue. Here we have three fine samples of an exclusive and judgemental Me Only movement.

In order to protect the group from the world around, the Me Only movement of so called Christian communities tend to build walls around themselves, to create rules that are supposed to reflect the authentic faith and they favour excommunication as a means of coercion. You are in or out.

This religious movement finds an expression in any form of political nationalism where the country, land or nation become mine only, ours only. Migrants and foreigners are considered as invaders and threats.

Like those we meet in our Gospel reading, at the end of the day, the Me First and Me Only movements tend to kill people. Unfortunately in some parts of the world, they kill physically, while in other parts, they kill spiritually by excluding and ignoring those who do not conform to their principles.

The Me First and Me Only movements go against everything Jesus did and said, they stand for values which have nothing to do with Christianity.

The world, this world that God loves so much (cf. Jn 3:16), is not a place where either we are supposed to fight in order to be the first or we have to exclude others in order to feel good and secure.

We cannot be saved on our own or as a small exclusive sectarian church worshipping a small God. The God of Jesus Christ “desires everyone to be saved” (1Tim 2:4). We cannot expect to be saved if, along the way, we have ignored or despised those who are poor, the migrants, those whom Jesus considers as the least of his brothers and sisters (cf. Mt 25:40).

It is imperative for us to have a heart and mind as wide and generous as our heavenly Father, to breathe with the Spirit whose presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time (cf. St John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 28), and, with Jesus, to walk all the human roads, all the paths and alleys which lead to the hearts of our brothers and sisters. There we are called to bring the light and life that have been confided to us.