

Sunday September 26th, 2021
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Parishioner Reflection

By: Jim McDonald

The first reading from the Book of Numbers immediately follows Moses' cry to the Lord for help in leading a very restless and complaining, even ungrateful, people, the very people who God had rescued from slavery in Egypt with powerful signs and wonders. The Lord took some of the spirit that was on Moses and placed it on the seventy elders that Moses had gathered in accordance with the Lord's instruction. Two others who had registered had remained in the camp (making 72, see Luke 10: 1-12), yet even these two prophesied. Joshua's reaction to this news was the same as John's reaction to the news in today's Gospel reading that someone was casting out demons in Jesus' name who was not following Jesus with his disciples. But as in Moses' response, Jesus told John not to stop him. "Whoever is not against us is for us." (Mark 9:40) To stop him would be to "... put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me ...", with tragic consequences.

In the second reading from the Letter of James, James admonishes the rich for storing up earthly treasure that lasts only a short time and then rots and decays. Wealth in itself is not evil except when it is held and used selfishly and not shared generously with those in need. By acquiring wealth for themselves, the rich "...have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you." (ESV CE James 5:6) This reflects Jesus' Parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12:13-21. If the rich person's heart is rooted in love of God and neighbour, they must use their wealth to witness to the boundless love and generosity of God, that is, do the work of God.

It is not important to Jesus how wealthy we are in the material sense, but how much we love Him and our neighbour (including the stranger!) and how we invest our talents for the building up of his Kingdom. Recall the widow who gave her last penny as an offering at the temple. "Truly I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." (Mark 12:43-44) It is God who multiplies our offerings and efforts that are freely given from a generous heart and are made out of genuine love for Him and for our neighbour. All things are possible for God.

If the Christian community is to be a genuine and faithful witness to God the Father's limitless mercy and love in the gift of His Son Jesus Christ, it must genuinely and consistently live in a way that sets it apart and that radiates Jesus's love and compassion for all.

The Letter of James, written to the twelve tribes in the dispersion, is a very stern call to fidelity to the faith and adherence to the teaching of the Gospel. James is well aware that it is very easy for us to relax the demands of love, faithfulness and self-sacrifice as a means to make our lives easier, especially if the demands mean that we may have to suffer, even just a little. Our fallen natures have no trouble justifying to ourselves that we “deserve” this or that material reward for our own happiness. James’ admonishment of the rich may seem harsh but it is intended to startle them out of their complacency and self-sufficiency. Everything we have is a gift from God. We must put it to use for the building up of God’s kingdom, to support our families, community and the poor. It is in doing this that we reflect God’s love, mercy and providence for everyone, including the poor and the marginalised.

This also speaks to the gospel reading for today in which Jesus makes it very clear that we must strive to work for the kingdom out of love and faithfulness to the gospel. Our actions can be detrimental to our own salvation by separating us from God in sin, but they can also be perceived by others, intentionally or otherwise, to be contrary to the Gospel that we profess and thus place “stumbling blocks” in the paths of those seeking to know God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Let us pray that we as a community may continue to grow in the knowledge of God through our Lord Jesus Christ and that we may strive for holiness, filled with His grace and mercy, and thereby be a faithful witness in our community to the boundless love of Jesus Christ.
Our Lady of Grace, please pray for us.