



26th Week of Ordinary Time: 26/27th September

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“God’s Spirit in the World.”

I think it is generally true to say that it is a bit galling when we find someone pushing into our area of responsibility and taking credit for it! I remember a friend telling me about her work in “promotion”. She had done all the work: gathered the people for this fundraiser event, sent out the publicity, prepared the venue. And, when all was ready a person superior to her in the organization walked in and took over!

I was reminded of this, when I read the first reading from the Book of Numbers and the Gospel from St Mark for the 26th Sunday. In the Book of Numbers we hear Joshua complain to Moses that others – in this case 2 persons Eldad and Medad – had started to “prophesy”: something he and others had come to see at their prerogative as the Elders of the people. The response of Moses to the request from Joshua to stop them: “Are you jealous on my account? If only the whole people of the Lord were prophets, and the Lord gave his spirit to them all!”

In a similar way we read in the Gospel of St Mark for the 26th Sunday that John had gone to Jesus to complain “Master, we saw a man who is not one of us casting out devils in your name; and because he was not one of us, we tried to stop him.” The response of Jesus: “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.”

One of the things that has struck me about the words and actions of Pope Francis is how he has sought to find common ground with people of other Faiths, and in particular his approach spelled out in Fratelli Tutti, we are all brothers and sisters under God our Creator. Ferlita in his work *The Paths of Life* in his commentary on this Sunday’s reading sums up the teaching: “The just, the good, the true, let them live, wherever they are found.”

He goes on “Jesus tolerance, however, is not to be confused with indifference” as is clear in the Gospel too “if anybody scandalizes, that is causes another to sin, it would be better to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck.... if your hand should cause you to sin, cut it off and if your foot should cause you to sin, cut it off; it is better to enter into life lame; than to have two feet and be thrown in to hell.” Jesus, of course, is not suggesting that anyone take him literally; he is speaking in hyperbole; it is his way of saying “I mean business” comments Ferlita.

I found these words of Father Peter Hill, a Redemptorist from the Caribbean Island of Dominica, sum up the message of the Scriptures well “our texts challenge us, as people of Faith, to pay attention to the important things. Both Joshua and John missed the bigger picture, which is about God’s Mission in the World. Jesus has no problem with good

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works being done in his name, nor is he concerned about who does it...when we are tempted to think that we have a corner on Jesus' name and power, the text challenges us to broaden our horizons. Wherever we witness works of love, forgiveness, charity, justice, healing, liberation, peacebuilding, mercy and the like – regardless of where they come from – they are works of Christ.”

I recall these words of Jesus to Nicodemus in St John's Gospel Chapter 3:8 “The wind blows wherever it pleases; you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. That is how it is with all who are born of the Spirit.”

Last week, visiting the Catacombs of Priscilla in Rome, I noted the dominant image was of the Good Shepherd, Jesus, carrying the lambs (we are the flock), on His shoulders. I think that image dominates the life of Pope Francis too: he comes as a Shepherd. Like Jesus came “not to condemn the world” but so that “the world might be saved”, Francis has set out to do the same. That makes for some delicate pastoral dilemmas, but the pastoral, caring role of the shepherd is always dominant.

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