

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN THE
CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
September 26, 2021**

SCRIPTURES:

Numbers 11:25-29	God chooses 70 elders to share leadership with Moses.
James 5:1-6	Fraud and greed will be punished.
Mark 9:38-48	All who do good in the name of Jesus are his disciples.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the Scriptures carefully in your group, beginning with the Gospel. Take a few minutes in silence to hear the Lord speaking to the heart. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the Church community. What does God want the community to hear today?

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Numbers:

In addition to the 70 who were gathered in one place when God bestowed the blessing and responsibility of prophecy, two others, not physically present there, also received the gift. Moses accepts them, too, since they were obviously chosen and gifted by God. Gifts are bestowed by God on whomever he chooses. We can only judge by the results. We cannot control the gifts of the Lord. It does not belong to us to restrict God's choice. God gives the gifts of leadership in the community to whomever he wills. We can only bow our heads and acknowledge the gifts of God when we see them displayed before us in the lives of people we ourselves would not have chosen for leadership among God's people.

James:

New Testament thinking on the seductiveness of riches echoes the experience of the Jewish people in late Old Testament times. Wealth often attracted people to compromise their faithfulness to God and to God's law in their effort to collaborate with pagan authorities. Making money often required that the Jewish person accommodate himself to the rules and values of the Greek and Roman occupation forces. They had to insert themselves into the prevailing culture in order to conduct their business enterprises. Thus, the danger of religious contamination. Early Christianity, especially those communities coming out of the Jewish heritage, will manifest a decidedly negative attitude toward wealth, assuming often that it has been misbegotten.

Mark:

This section of Mark's Gospel strings together various sayings of Jesus without any apparent connecting logic, other than some words. "In the name of Christ" provides us today with a reference

to the first reading where two additional prophets speak in God's name.

For the Christian Community, the teaching strongly proclaims that the essential link between Christ and the believer will be manifested in the works of Christ being performed. Whoever does the work of the Gospel is a disciple. That is the only qualification. The Church must not set up barriers that would exclude people who proclaim the name of Jesus Christ.

The second section is concerned with those who lead others to sin, literally *a stumbling block*. Occasions of sin for oneself or for others need radical resolution. Whatever it takes! The point here is that radical measures are sometimes necessary in so important a matter. Avoiding sin is the most important issue. Life itself will have no value if one is constantly led into sin. The Semitic hyperbole here suggests that one must deal effectively with the causes of sin.

Gehenna was literally the city dump outside Jerusalem where an ongoing fire consumed the garbage of the city and its inhabitants. Before the time of King David, the place had been the site of a pagan shrine where children were sacrificed to the god Moloch. The term *Gehenna* had come to mean "everlasting fire" and "eternal damnation."

Surely, this teaching of Jesus, that present behavior is fraught with eternal consequence, has reinforced his teaching about reward and punishment in the next life.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What other persons, not belonging to your group (age group, parish, gender, color), are also doing good things for God? List the persons you have heard about who are doing God's work in the world without belonging to the Catholic Church. How can that be? Do you believe what you see out there in the world?

2. Discuss how we have been conditioned to look down on those who do not belong (as we define belonging). How come we can decide who does not belong to God? By their works or by their place in society? Have you decided to exclude someone in your family who does not measure up to your standards? What about the people of your parish? Are they all absolutely like you in every way? How come God has called them, too?

3. God chooses the most unlikely people to be coworkers in the kingdom. Identify the apostles and some of our members today who resemble them.

PRAYER

Rite of Peace

**Lord Jesus Christ,
you said to your Apostles:
I leave you peace; my peace I give you.
Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church,
and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom,
where you live forever and ever. Amen.**

(Communion Rite from the Roman Missal)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

At the Second Vatican Council (1963-65), the Catholic Church proposed several clarifications of its beliefs and teachings concerning its relationship with other religious groups. Truths about God and about the dignity of the human person are not restricted to the Church itself. Other peoples, other churches, other religious traditions also possess and teach truth and serve as channels of God's love for the people whom they serve.

While claiming to have been especially gifted with the fullness of God's revealed truth and having been protected from error by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church nevertheless acknowledges that God is at work for the salvation of humankind in the other great religions of the world and in other Christian churches and ecclesial communities.

God is not limited in the exercise of mercy and in the bestowing of blessings. The ministry of the Catholic Church will always be to witness to the fullness of God's truth and to call all people to unity in the body of Christ as visibly expressed in membership under the unifying ministry of the successor of Peter. However, the Catholic Church does not pretend to be the sole possessor of God's marvelous love.

The Catholic people remain committed to a missionary effort toward those whom God calls to unity in the visible Church, while at the same time honoring with the deepest respect the work that God has already accomplished, and continues to accomplish, in other faiths and in other churches. Others must always be invited to share with us in fullness of fellowship in the Catholic Church. The more we are ourselves evangelized with the truth of the Gospel, the more we will be eager to share with others. But, there is no place for chauvinism or for exclusivity in our religious attitudes and programs.

See *Lumen Gentium* and *Unitatis Redintegratio*, from Vatican II.
See also *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* # 811 and following.

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