

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Homily by
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September 30, 2018

A new season is upon us; a blessed Fall to you! It seems that this year, fall weather began right on schedule. I love the crisp mornings and warm, sunny days of Fall!

In the recent month, we have also had a change of liturgical "season:" A change in the focus and tone of the Sunday readings.

After an August-long detour to the Bread of Life discourse in the Gospel according to John, in September the readings returned to the Gospel according to Mark, while the second reading throughout this month has been from the Letter of St. James. In these readings, St. James has given us a "practical guide" to our faith. Throughout the month, we have been challenged to "**be doers of the word and not hearers only.**" We have been confronted with, and urged to change, our human tendency to behave more civilly and compassionately with a rich person than with one who is poor. St. James bluntly tell us that "**faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**" And last week, we heard James tell us about **genuine wisdom**. You may recall that reading:

“... wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity.”

Genuine wisdom doesn't come from within ourselves, it comes as a gift from the Holy Spirit. Genuine wisdom doesn't necessarily come with age, or through education, but is given to us as a gift of grace through the Holy Spirit.

The **Gifts of the Holy Spirit**, traditionally seven in number, come down to us from the Book of Isaiah (Is 11:2-3). In Isaiah, these gifts are considered those that the Messiah would possess. Through Jesus, in the sacrament of Confirmation, we each receive a share in these Gifts of the Holy Spirit: **Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, Counsel, Fortitude, Piety, and Fear of the Lord.**

- **Wisdom:** Helps us recognize the importance of others and the importance of keeping God central in our lives.
- **Understanding:** The grace to comprehend the meaning of God's message.
- **Knowledge:** The ability to think about and explore God's revelation, and also to recognize that there are mysteries of faith beyond our comprehension.

- **Counsel:** Allows us to see the best way to follow God's plan when we have choices before us.
- **Fortitude:** The courage to do what we know is right.
- **Piety:** Enables us to pray to God in true devotion.
- **Fear of the Lord:** The feeling, not of fear, but of amazement before God, who is all-present, and whose friendship we don't want to lose.

These gifts of the Holy Spirit are at issue in today's first reading and Gospel, in which Joshua and John have a similar problem: **They think that they, and not God, have all of the answers and know what is best.** They refuse to believe that someone who is not a member of their group (Eldad and Medad in the first reading, and the unnamed "someone driving out demons" in the Gospel) can possibly be imbued with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Joshua and John were thinking as man, and not as God, thinks.

The examples of Joshua and John are a lesson for us to avoid judgments that lead to factionalism and discrimination in our community. None of us can possibly understand God's plans for each person on this earth nor can we fathom the workings of the Holy Spirit.

However, that has not stopped us, as individuals and as a Church, from making judgments, erroneous judgments, about individuals, saints,

who went on to lead lives of heroic virtue despite the human opposition and roadblocks that they faced. A few examples include:

- St. John Vianney (the Cure of Ars): Coming from a poor, but devout family, he faced an arduous path to the priesthood. He faced many obstacles before being accepted to the seminary. He was a so-so seminary student, of whom his superiors had extremely low expectations. As a result, soon after ordination, he was assigned to the remote, backwater village of Ars. However, he had a priestly heart burning with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, with love for Jesus and for his parishioners. Consequently, this priest, whom so many considered to be mediocre, through the force of his integrity and holiness, became an epicenter for a renewal of the faith in the wake of the French revolution. He soon attracted people from all over France and throughout Europe and, today, is held in such high esteem that he is the patron saint of parish priests!
- Bernadette Soubirous: This poor, illiterate 14-year old from Lourdes, France, who hadn't even heard of the Immaculate Conception, faced much scorn and ridicule before she (and Our Lady) were able to convince church authorities as to the authenticity of the apparitions of Our Lady of Lourdes.

- Mother Teresa of Calcutta: This diminutive, barely 5 foot tall, Superior General of the Missionaries of Charity, wouldn't warrant a second look in the secular world; yet, this saint had a global impact on the way we view the "poorest of the poor."

Like Joshua and John in today's readings, we can refuse to acknowledge God's good work in the lives of others because they aren't "one of us," because they look different, have a different educational background or belong to a different social or ethnic group. We can also be dismissive of the good someone else is doing simply because it's not the way we would have done it, forgetting that the Holy Spirit works in many diverse, and sometimes mysterious, ways.

OR

We can be true disciples of Christ with an attitude of encouragement, tolerance, compassion and acceptance of the gifts of others. Rather than quenching the Spirit in others and hindering the good work that God is doing through them, we are urged to recognize, encourage and affirm others.

For as Moses concludes in today's first reading:

"Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets!

Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit on them all!"