



Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

The Twenty-Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time

September 30, 2018

St. Mary of the Assumption Parish

Today's Themes in Scripture

The stories in the First Reading and in the beginning of today's Gospel share a parallel theme. In the First Reading, God took some of his Spirit from Moses and bestowed it on the elders who were gathered together. Then they all began to prophesy. Two elders who did not make it to the gathering with Moses were also given a portion of God's Spirit. They, too, were seen prophesying in the camp where they stayed behind. This was reported to Moses, who was also told to make them stop. In the Gospel, John told Jesus that some of the disciples had observed someone attempting to heal another in Jesus' name. Since the would-be healer was not a member of Jesus' disciples, they tried to stop what he was doing.

Prophecy and healing are two manifestations of the Spirit of God in action, but in these two stories the disciples of Moses and Jesus failed to see God at work in what they observed. The ones doing the prophesying, and the one doing the healing, were acting in the Spirit but the disciples who saw them did not think that was likely. After all, the two elders in the camp, hadn't joined Moses and the others as planned, so they didn't really deserve God's Spirit like the others. The one who was found trying to cast out a demon was not in Jesus' inner circle of disciples, and therefore really wasn't entitled to act like Jesus or one of them.

Most human beings, just like the disciples in today's stories, spend too much time thinking about who is worthy enough, suitable enough, or credentialed enough to receive God's gifts or act in his name. Moses and Jesus understood the extravagant generosity of God who pours out his love and Spirit according to his will, even on those whom others find unworthy or undeserving.

Instead of making judgments about others, today's readings suggest what the followers of Jesus *should* be doing: avoiding the temptation to accumulate riches at the expense of those who are poor, never causing anyone to fall into sin, and doing anything necessary to prevent ourselves from sinning. That should be more than enough to keep us busy.

Sunday Readings and Background

Reading I: Numbers 11:25-29

Moses shared his gifts among the people.

- The first reading from Numbers addresses the individuals who assisted Moses in the leadership of the people.
- The seventy elders have authority because God's Spirit has been bestowed on them.
- Moses reminds Joshua that the focus is to be on God and not on earthly leaders.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 19: 8, 10, 12-13, 14

The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

Reading II: James 5:1-6

Let the rich be warned!

- The letter from James reprimands Christians for their excessive concern with earthly riches.
- These have become an obstacle to their faith.
- Not only are they inordinately possessive of what they have accumulated, but they have grown rich at the expense of others.

Gospel: Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

Anyone who is not against us is for us.

- John presumes that any person who is not part of the apostle's group should not invoke Jesus' name in ministry.
- Jesus points out that anyone who recognizes his name, whether or not the person belongs to the community, will be rewarded because the person honors Jesus' name.
- In the latter part of the passage, Jesus uses highly figurative language to emphasize that nothing is more important than belonging to the reign of God, no matter what the cost.

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Calling All Prophets

Our world is currently experiencing tumultuous situations that have and will continue to have, adverse effects on both human and non-human life. Every nook and cranny of our planet is heating up at a pace never seen before in history. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report, written by hundreds of climate experts and scientists, indicates that recent anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases are the highest in history. Record-breaking temperatures, humidity, sea level rise, and many other factors indicate that Earth is warming fast.

Elsewhere on the planet, poverty has a strangle hold on much of the world's population. At least 80 percent of humanity lives on less than 10 dollars a day. A bi-product of poverty is hunger. More than 66 million primary school-age children across the developing world attend classes hungry; 23 million hungry are in Africa alone. Globally, about 281 million people are undernourished. Furthermore, more than 1.4 million people worldwide die each year from violence. With statistics such as these that grow more dire every day, the words of an ancient biblical text, "Would that all people of the Lord were prophets" are like a scream in the night that pierce the silence of a slumbering world too groggy to realize that what our neighbor's terrible plight today will soon become our own reality tomorrow if we do not work together to change the collision course that life is traveling right now.

This Sunday's readings remind us that just like our ancestors of old, we too have been given a share of the divine prophetic spirit which is not reserved only for certain people. This spirit is given freely for the sake of all the world's communities of life. In the first reading from the book of Numbers, the biblical writer features the people encamped with Moses and God bestowing upon them a share of the divine prophetic spirit that had been given to Moses.

In Psalm 19, this Sunday's responsorial psalm, the psalmist celebrates God's law — the decrees, precepts, ordinances — all of which give joy to the heart. God's law is to be understood as the law of love that encompasses love of God, love of self and love of neighbor. The last two stanzas of the psalm feature the psalmist in a self-reflective mood. The psalmist desires to be divinely cleansed of unknown faults and safeguarded against wanton sin. This divine cleansing and safeguard are necessary when exercising one's prophetic vocation so that one does not become a living hypocrisy between what one says and what one does.

The second reading from the Letter of James provides a deeper understanding of how the prophetic spirit works. This message, delivered after the time of Pentecost when the church was given the Spirit of God, features James — the so-named author of the text — acting boldly. He addresses the wealthy of his community. With tongue-in-cheek, he invites them to weep and wail over their impending miseries. All that they have gained through injustice will come to naught. The wealth around which they have centered their lives will become worthless, and their lives will follow suit. Justice will be served for those who have been treated unjustly. Thus, acting in accord with the prophetic Spirit, James delivers a stinging message to the rich of his community whose wealth is ill-gotten. Simultaneously, his message is a hopeful one for the poor. Their plight does not go unchecked.

Just as some members in Moses' camp were surprised to learn that God's spirit came to rest upon Eldad and Medad who were not in the gathering of the 70 elders, and just as Joshua wanted Moses to stop Eldad and Medad from prophesying — a request that was not granted — so too, John in Mark's Gospel wants Jesus to prevent a certain unnamed person from driving out demons. Eldad and Medad were thought to be "outsiders" which is the same situation for the unnamed "exorcist" in Mark's Gospel. Thus, God's prophetic Spirit is given freely and stirred up freely, to the surprise of many people who thought they were specially chosen to receive such a wonderful gift. The Gospel closes on a note of muted warning: Be on guard against sin lest it become a stumbling block.

In sum, this Sunday's readings invite us to ponder the ways of our God whose prophetic Spirit has been poured out freely upon all people, all creation. This gift calls us to speak truth to power, to be open to others who have received this gift, and to be self-reflective for the sake of fostering and maintaining right relationship with all.

