

TRINITY 17/ORD 26
Num 11:25-28
James 5:1-6
Mk 9:38-43;45;47-48

Today's readings seem to make the point that those who are not against Jesus and his disciples are for him (Mk 9:40). Yet Jesus also said that those who are not for him are against him (Lk 11:23).

The Children of Israel were crossing the wilderness after being freed from slavery in Egypt. Yet they still behaved like slaves. They depended on Moses to provide them with everything they needed and to resolve all their issues and disputes. As a result Moses suffered from burn out and told God he couldn't go on. God's response was to have him gather 70 elders at the Tent of Meeting outside the camp, where he would give them a share of Moses' spirit of prophecy. Only 68 turned up because two remained in the camp. Joshua was not happy because these two also received a share of the prophetic spirit. Moses wisely tells Joshua that God's blessings are gifts given to whoever he chooses, so he had better get used to it.

Jesus faced a similar situation when a non-disciple was successful in performing exorcisms in his name. John told the exorcist to stop and expected Jesus to agree. Jesus reminds John that if a non-disciple does good through using Jesus' name, they are not an enemy so must be given the benefit of the doubt. Jesus did not encourage a 'closed shop' mentality, for even non-believers who show kindness to the disciples and the Church, will be rewarded. This presumes that those who persecute the Church will be punished at the Last Judgement.

St James' epistle goes further and says that if the faithful oppress or cheat others, they too will face Judgement.

It can be very irritating when secular people demand a higher moral standard for Christians than they do for themselves. Yet it is equally unacceptable when Christians are judgemental of others, especially fellow disciples who hold differing views or use differing forms of worship. This too is a 'closed shop' mentality. "Judge not," Jesus says. Judgment is way above a disciple's pay grade!

What Jesus asks of us is repentance which is trying to turn away from our failures and distractions. 'Trying is the Dying,' that is the dying to self-centredness so that the new you can be born. All we can do is try, and at the Last Judgement the question we will be asked is not, "What did you achieve?" but, "How hard did you try?" When we are down, we must get up. When we are distracted in prayer, re-focus on God. Just think how many acts of repentance we can make doing this in our prayers. Even so, whoever or whatever leads us into sin, that is away from God, must be cut out. After all, Jesus points out that a restricted life is better than a full life if that life leads us to separation from God.

It is easy to say these things in a homily, but much more difficult to do them in practice. Of course the homilist is also preaching to himself in these matters! In his book, 'Wisdom from the Western Isles,' David Torkington says that we must even be ready to give up those

harmless pleasures or activities we enjoy **IF** they lead us away from our daily prayer and worship time. If they don't, enjoy them, but Jesus makes it clear that trying to seek God and his Kingdom must be the number one priority for any disciple. Trying is the key word because we can keep on trying no matter how often we fail. A phrase that got implanted in my brain as a child was, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try and try again." This applies to our spiritual lives as much as it does to anything else.

Msgr Harry Entwistle
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