

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Gospel text (Mk 9:38-43.45.47-48): At that time, John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us." Jesus replied, "Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us. Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward.

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'"

«No one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me»

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Today, following the example of the most modern TV producer, we are given to see Jesus conjuring images of unstoppable fire and worms into a place we have to avoid

by all means: into hell, “where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’” (Mk 9:48). It is a vivid description of the state a person may attain when his life has not carried him where he wanted to go. It could be compared to the moment when, while driving our car, we take the wrong road by thinking it is the right one, and we end up in an unknown place, not knowing where we are and where we did not certainly want to go. We have to avoid it, no matter how, even if we have to get rid of our hands (cf. Mk 9,43), feet (cf. Mk 9,45), eyes (cf. Mk 9,47). We have to have the strong desire to enter into the Kingdom of God even if we have to go without an essential part of ourselves.

It is possible that this Gospel may encourage us to mull over something we may have, very dear to us, but that prevents us from seeing God, —or even worse— that pushes us away from God.

The same Jesus leads us to look for the sin responsible for all our failings (hands, feet and eyes). Jesus speaks about anyone that could cause one of these little ones who believe in Him to stumble and sin (cf. Mk 9:42). “To cause someone to sin” is to turn someone away from God. We, therefore, appraise in every person his nearness to Jesus, the faith he may have.

Jesus teaches us we do not have to belong to the Twelve or to be one of his most intimate disciples to be able to stay beside Him: “For whoever is not against us is for us” (Mk 9:40). However, some might imply our salvation is a very simple thing. But it is not. Our salvation is an accomplished fact only if we are in Christ. It is a lesson of today's Gospel: many are those who, because of their deeds, are closer to the Kingdom of God than we may think. As St. Therese of Lisieux admitted: “The Lord cannot reward me for my deeds (...) Thus, I hope He will reward me for His.”