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.'"

“There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me”

Fr. Valentí ALONSO i Roig
(Barcelona, Spain)

Today, in the style of the most modern TV director, we see Jesus conjuring images of unstoppable fire and worms into a place we have to avoid by all means: 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 might find themselves in when their life has not taken them where they wanted to go. It could be compared to the moment when, while driving, we take the wrong road, thinking we're headed in the right direction, only to end up in an unknown place, not knowing where we are or where we didn’t want to go. We must avoid this at all costs, 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 must desire to enter into life or into the Kingdom of God, even if it’s without an essential part of ourselves.

This Gospel likely invites us to reflect and discover what is preventing us from going toward God, no

matter how much it seems to belong to us, —or even worse, what is driving us away from Him.

Jesus Himself guides us to identify the sin into which our own things (hands, feet, and eyes) lead us. Jesus speaks of those who cause the little ones who believe in Him to stumble (cf. Mk 9:42). To “cause someone to sin” means to lead someone away from the Lord. Therefore, let us value in each person their closeness to Jesus and the faith they have.

Jesus teaches us that it is not necessary to be one of the Twelve or one of the closest disciples to be with Him: “For whoever is not against us is for us” (Mk 9:40). We can understand from this that Jesus saves all. This is a lesson from today's Gospel: there are many who are closer to the Kingdom of God than we think, because they perform miracles in the name of Jesus. As St. Therese of Lisieux confessed, “The Lord will not be able to repay me according to my works. Very well, then, I trust that He will repay me according to His works.”

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "While sincerely honoring all peoples, their cultures, and traditions, we respectfully invite them to listen to Him and open their hearts" (Saint John Paul II)

- "Indeed, an inconsistent Christian does a lot of harm, and the strong image used by Jesus is very eloquent. Therefore, the life of a Christian is on the path of coherence" (Francis)

- " Following the example of Christ, the Church warns the faithful of the "sad and lamentable reality of eternal death", also called "hell." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nº 1056)