

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [B]

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*Numbers 11:25-29; James 5:1-6; Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48*

Today's readings can be summarized like this: *the problem of the church becoming its own worst enemy.*

Really, it is an age old tactic that goes far beyond people portrayed in the Bible. One of the most effective means to undermine your opponent is to divide your opponent. Set your enemy at odds with him/herself and – bam! - you can sweep him/her away with the ease of collecting the leaves this time of year. In other words, get your enemy to fight him/herself and you won't have to fight him/her.

The enemy of the Christ tries time and again to undermine us in the same way: by sowing dissension – *jealousy, rivalry, turf wars*. And when this happens in the Church, we wind up spending our energy fighting each other instead of laboring for the Lord.

This is exactly at play in the **First Reading** from the *Book of Numbers*. God takes some of His Spirit given previously to Moses and shares it with seventy other adults to help Moses lead His People. So then Moses and 70 others all were seized by the spirit of the Lord, that is, they knew what to say and do because they were inspired specially by the Lord God.

Along come two characters – identified as *Eldad* and *Medad* – who for whatever reason were not with the 70 others the moment the Spirit of God was bestowed. Nevertheless, we hear that the Spirit of the Lord descended also upon Eldad and Medad and they, too, began to prophesy.

Right away a young man runs to Joshua – Moses' first lieutenant - and complains that these two – Eldad and Medad - weren't in the official group and they are prophesying. Gasp! Joshua similarly is offended and they make straightway to Moses and tell Moses to stop these two.

Now, why are they trying to stop Eldad and Medad from speaking God's Word

Well, these two had not been with the official group at the right time. They were not a part of the officially recognized in-group. No criticism is raised about the content of their prophesying – no. They are upset only by Eldad and Medad not being present at the beginning, criticizing as if that was the exclusive moment for God to show His power.

The jealousy, rivalry and turf war of a few threatened to divide the entire community. And what was Moses response? To grab Eldad and Medad by the collar and throw them all the way back into Egypt? Moses exclaims, "Are you

jealous for my sake” [read: Really, are you kidding me?]. Moses continues, “Oh that all the people of Lord were prophets!”

Moses knew these men had the spirit of the Lord. That is why they were able to add to the mission of the 70 others. Moses did not allow petty jealous to undermine the mission – no way!

Just last weekend we had a wonderful Oktoberfest at the county fair grounds. All three parishes and our Catholic school sponsored the celebration. Many of the organizers were wearing shirts with “STAFF” emblazoned across the back. They worked hard and made it happen. And there were others of us who pitched in – selling tickets, running tables, serving food, escorting visitors – who did not have staff shirts on. Imagine yelling at an organizer to make us stop helping because we did not have staff shirts!

The ***Gospel According to Mark*** has a very similar message. John complains to Jesus that some not of their group are driving out demons in Jesus’ name. John is thinking, “hey, we’re the in group, we are the disciples, we’re the one who have received a special commission – who are these clowns pretending to drive out demons in Jesus’ name?”

And Jesus says, “don’t prevent them. Whoever is not against us is for us.” John was angry that someone outside their little circle might get credit. Like Moses before him, Jesus too is not about to play this silly game. What matters are that demons are being driven out in the name of Jesus, the mission of the Church is being fulfilled – that’s what matters. Not these petty games of who’s in and who’s out, who’s got the power, who doesn’t, who’s recognized and who isn’t.

My brothers and sisters, what matters is the mission and its fulfillment of Christ and His Church and our working together to make it so. There is no place for inner jealousy, rivalry and turf wars – none at all.

And yet, sometimes this does happen in the Church. We can become consumed by what we are doing instead of why we are doing.

Oftentimes I see teens understanding this far better than we adults. I look at our Catholic school where teens see themselves not from rival parishes but as one Catholic school student body. I look at Sandusky Life Teen where teens see themselves not from rival high schools but as members of one Catholic Faith.

Oh, that every person indeed might be a prophet for the Lord God.