

HOMILY for 26th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year B

This Sunday's 1st Reading & Gospel tell us to let people outside of our Christian faith to call on the name of Jesus to do good things for our world. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

The priest became friends with the rabbi whose synagogue was across the street from his church. One day he couldn't help remarking that the church was in perfect repair, while the synagogue needed a new roof & was generally dilapidated.

"I don't seem to be able to get a penny out of my congregation," confessed the rabbi, "wealthy though they are. And while your parishioners are mostly blue-collar workers, you're probably rolling in money."

"I'll show you how to do it," offered the priest generously, & beckoned the rabbi to follow him into the Confessional booth. Soon a penitent entered. "Father, I have sinned," she murmured. "I have bad thoughts."

"Three Hail Mary's & ten dollars in the Collection Box," ordered the priest. And so it went, for each of his sinning parishioners, the priest prescribed some Hail Mary's & a donation. Eventually the priest turned to the rabbi & suggested that handle the next one. "Professional courtesy," he said with a smile. "I'm sure you've gotten the point."

So the rabbi was behind the screen when the next person came into the Confessional booth. "Father, I had bad thoughts three times last week," she confessed in a whisper.

"Thirty dollars & nine Hail Mary's" ordered the rabbi.

"But Father, I only have twenty-five dollars," she admitted in great distress.

"That's alright," the rabbi consoled her, not missing a beat. "Put the twenty-five in the Collection Box & go home & do it again. We've got a special this week – four for the price of two & a half!"

Anyway, I don't know about you, but if I were Jesus, I'd ask the disciples, "Who made you the religious police?" Apparently, Jesus' disciples caught someone outside of their group invoking their Master's name to drive out demons & wanted to stop them. Here is how this Sunday's Gospel describes that situation for us: "John said to Jesus: 'Teacher, we saw a man using your name to expel demons & we tried to stop him because he is not of our company.' Jesus said in reply; 'Do not try to stop him. No man who performs a miracle using my name can at one speak ill of me. Anyone who is not against us is with us.'" Evidently the disciples witnessed someone use Jesus' name to do a good thing for the community. They decided to stop him & told Jesus about it thinking that He would at least praise & thank them for it. But, they got the opposite reaction from Jesus. He told them to let that person continue to do that & added, "Anyone who is not against us is with us." Basically Jesus wanted to remind His disciples to avoid the tribal mentality & divide up the community of God's people. He wanted them to work with people of good will around the world to further His mission of salvation & bring God's love & healing to the suffering & the outcast.

However, the situation in this Sunday's Gospel did not happen exclusively in Jesus' time. In fact, this Sunday's First Reading shares with us a similar example as following, "...When a young man quickly told Moses, 'Eldad & Medad are prophesying in the camp.' Joshua, son of Nun, who from his youth had been Moses' aide, said, 'Moses, my Lord, stop them.' But, Moses answered him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the people of the Lord are prophets? Would that the Lord might bestow His Spirit on them all?'" Apparently an aide for Moses did not think Eldad & Medad have the proper commission to prophesize. Hence he called on Moses to stop them from doing it. Like Jesus, Moses did not do that & told them that the Holy Spirit might have blessed them & commissioned them as it did to the seventy elders. He helped them realize that the Holy Spirit would want all the people of God to be prophets & send them out to do that important work.

We might think that Jesus' disciples & Moses' aide are the only selfish & narrow-minded people as they tried to put restriction on who could use Jesus' name to expel demons, or who could prophesize

to the world. However, I believe that virus is alive & well in all of us as we tend to look inward & protect our own interests without any concern for the whole community. This virus is rooted in our human shortcomings of selfishness & envy. We usually do not look out for the welfare of the community, especially the citizens of the Western world. If we show any interest or care for the community, we are being labeled “Communist or Socialist.” We have seen how politicians have used that rhetoric to destroy any interest in building a community or uniting with one another to form a world of peace & harmony. In fact, I have experienced the resistance of communal spirit first hand in the seminary.

My seminary classmates all knew that I came from Viet Nam & thought that I’m terribly influenced by the Communist system as they often teased me & bragged about how wonderful the Capitalist system is. They sometimes dismissed any discussion or forgot to focus on the community. They did not realize that I’m all for personal freedom & fair competition as we see that spirit being promoted in the Capitalist system. Indeed, while I lived under the Communist system, its school education held back my academic progress & made me take care of lazy & underperformed students. I sure hated that Communist approach toward education because it made me study at the same level with those students instead of encouraging academic competition & promoting me to advance classes. My seminary classmates definitely did not know that Jesus called on them/us to build up a community of peace & harmony by working with one another, not following a Communist system like they might assume.

Furthermore, like any government system, Capitalist system has its own weaknesses as well. In fact, this Sunday’s Second Reading points out those for us as following, “Come now, you rich, weep & wail over your impending miseries. Your wealth has rotted away, your clothes have become moth-eaten, your gold & silver have corroded, & that corrosion will be a testimony against you; it will devour your flesh like a fire... Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers who harvested your fields are crying aloud; & the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.” As you can see, James criticized the selfish & greedy attitude of the rich & the Capitalist system. This system that my seminary classmates praised about has failed to pay a fair wage for the lowly workers & bred a corrupted social class of the rich & an unjust society. So, it is important for us not to be gullible & buy into a Capitalist or Communist/Socialist system. Rather, we should follow our Lord’s guidance & try to build up a caring & peaceful community as we try to support & encourage one another to continue Jesus’ mission of salvation.

As we talk about supporting one another in the establishment of a caring & peaceful community, I can’t help but wonder if all the world religions should stop attacking one another & collaborate with one another on that common goal instead. That is exactly the mission of our Holy Father as he recently traveled to Asia to meet with Muslim leaders & build a good working relationship between Christians & Muslims. Other popes before him have done the same with religious leaders such as Buddhist, Jewish, & so on. If all religious leaders would share that same common goal & sentiment & avoid the senseless religious infighting, we would not only have a caring & peaceful world but also help move our human family a little closer to its God. By stoking up the religious fights, some leaders assume that it would distinguish their religions from others & keep them in power. That selfish & tribal attitude is at the root of all the religious conflicts. Both Jesus & Moses would want us to avoid it.

My dear brothers & sisters, aren’t you sick of all the religious fights & killing in our world? If you are, it is time for us to join hands with other religions to bring healing & love to our broken world. It is time for us to let other religions to invoke the name of Jesus to drive evil spirits out of our world & build up a caring & peaceful community. Let me end my homily here & leave with you this African proverb that was mentioned at the Priests Conference this year & also highlights the importance of collaborating with other religions for the sake of our world: “If we want to go quickly, we go alone. If we want to go far, we go together.”