

Reflection for 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In our gospel today, the disciples of Jesus refuse to recognize the authority of a man they saw exorcising simply because that man does not belong to their company. John reports to Jesus, “Master, we saw a man casting out devils in Your name; we tried to stop him because he is not one of us.”

Does the success of the outsider worry the disciples?

In the first chapter of the gospel of Mark, a father appealed to Jesus to heal his son who is possessed by an evil spirit that renders the boy unable to speak. According to the father, he already brought his son to the disciples of Jesus but they were not able to do anything at all. Apparently, as far as exorcism is concerned, the disciples are failures. Then, here comes an outsider who expels demons in Jesus’ name! The disciples’ reaction may not be right, but it is not difficult for us to understand how they feel. They do not want the outsider to continue in his exorcising and they hope that Jesus would stop him or, at least, would refuse to recognize him. If Jesus gives in to his disciples’ implicit request, the entire identity of the outsider will be subject to suspicion.

Indeed, we are disciples of Jesus, for sometimes, we think, act, and speak like them, don’t we? We feel threatened by the success of others, most especially those who do not belong to our company. We lose sleep over the possibility of being dampened in favour of the better, the more popular, the more patronized one. We fear being exchanged for others. Even among those who minister and serve in the church, competition is a menace. Ministers – lay and even ordained – can sometimes consider one another as rivals rather than co-workers in Christ. Can the success of other disciples lessen our being disciples ourselves? Do we become better servants of God by destroying His other servants? That is not what Jesus wants. Jesus is angry at disciples, church-ministers, and God’s servants who are like that.

“Whoever is not against us is for us,” Jesus says. Instead of approving what His disciples did to the outsider, Jesus challenges them to widen their view on God’s goodness. “Leave him in peace,” Jesus orders them. Jesus approves of the outsider whom His disciples want Him to disapprove. However, Jesus also assures His disciples that whoever welcomes them because they are His disciples will certainly not lose his reward. To be a disciple is to bless, not to curse. To be a disciple is to be a blessing to all, not be blest more than the rest.

May we learn this lesson and really live by it. (Fr. Richard Cortes)