

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's readings give us a warning against jealousy, intolerance and scandal. In the first reading, we find jealousy, in its destructive form of envy, raising its ugly head in Moses' assistant and successor, Joshua. Moses and seventy future helpers were called by the Lord God to the *Tent of Meeting* for the Spirit-giving ordination ceremony. But two of the invitees were absent, and Joshua could not tolerate these absent men prophesying in the camp without receiving God's Spirit in the *Tent of Meeting*. Moses had to instruct Joshua to be tolerant. This selection is intended to provide a Biblical background for Jesus' response to the same kind of jealousy noticed in his apostles.

In today's Gospel, we find intolerance among the apostles of Christ. John complains to Jesus that a man outside their group of selected disciples has been expelling demons in Jesus' Name. Jesus responds by giving the Apostles lessons in his kind of tolerance and in the reward to be given to outsiders for good deeds they do for the disciples of Jesus. We also hear the strong warning of Jesus against giving scandal, especially to innocent children, helpless members of the community and beginners in the Faith. Jesus instructs the Apostles, and us, that, just as a doctor might remove a limb or some part of the body in order to preserve the life of the whole body, so we must be ready to part with anything that causes us or others to sin and which leads to spiritual death. Jesus is inviting us to integrate our bodies into our following of Christ, so that our hands become instruments of compassion, healing and comfort, our feet help us to bring the Gospel to the world and our eyes learn to see the truth, goodness and beauty all around us.

We need to avoid conduct that can lead to scandal: We give scandal and become stumbling blocks to others: a) when we are unkind or unjust in our treatment to others, b) when we reject them because of their weakness, faults or sins, c) when we humiliate them by hurting their pride and damaging their self-image, d) when we discourage, ignore, or refuse to accept them, e) when we ridicule them or destroy their dreams, f) when we follow a double standard: "Do as I say; don't do as I do," g) when we set standards which are so high that we are unable to meet them ourselves, and h) when we become judgmental of those who are still struggling to reach a level of commitment that we feel is too low to be useful.

On the other hand, we become good role models: a) when we support and guide others in moments of doubt, weakness, and suffering, b) when we increase other people's self-confidence by accepting them as they are and enabling them to discover their hidden talents, c) when we help them to grow by inspiring and correcting them, d) when we forgive them and listen to them with patience, and e) when we make ourselves examples of Christian witnessing.

Let us learn the Christian virtue of tolerance: Christian tolerance asks that we bear with the weaknesses of others, without excusing the evil they do. Intolerance is a sign of a weak faith. Intolerance is also ineffective. An intolerant attitude will alienate, rather than attract sinners. Only genuine love can overcome hatred. The Church should display this kind of love to a hate-filled world. The Church is expected to present Christ to the world. How can the Church present Christ to the world today? Let us try both to learn and to practice the virtue of Christian tolerance in our interfaith and ecumenical activities by: a) remaining true to our conscience and beliefs, b) respecting the differences we encounter, c) working together on projects of common interest, d) affirming what is good in the other person's position, even when we disagree on certain things, and e) allowing the light of Christ to shine through our loving words and deeds.

He who is not against us is for us: There is a tendency in us to downgrade, condemn, slander, ridicule, put down and make insulting remarks against someone who is different from us. The Gospel invites us to respect the gifts of all those who work in Jesus' name. Though we need not and cannot accept all the view points of those who are opposed to us, Jesus teaches us to respect them and their viewpoints. All have a right to their own views and thoughts.

How wrong we are in thinking that we alone are right, all others are wrong; we alone possess the truth, others do not; we alone possess a monopoly over salvation. This does not mean, we accept anything and everything from anybody and agree with it. We too should have our own personal convictions. Tolerance involves a respect for various aspects and facets of the truth. But intolerance gives the impression that nothing is true beyond what our eyes can see. But, Jesus calls us to build up a truly tolerant and inclusive society by a genuine love and tolerance.