

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle B, 9.30.18

Numbers 11:25-29/James 5:1-6/

Mark 9:38-43,45,47-48

A CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER – THE WAY OF JESUS

Today's readings give hope to everyone who is not part of the "club," the elite, the 1% or the privileged. These readings are for the "Eldads and Medads, the loners and the losers, the disenfranchised, the poor, the women who have been silenced or ignored, and those who have no money to invest in the stock market; in other words, the very ones Jesus loves and invites to follow him. In Jesus' world of the Reign of God everyone who is open and touched by the Spirit belongs. Our Church today is facing a crisis. One of the sources of this crisis, as identified by Pope Francis and many, both inside and outside the church, is "clericalism." And there is a parallel crisis in society today. The source of this crisis is often named "patriarchy," but Jesus refers to it as the "empire" or the "kingdom of this world."



There are many words to use in describing the crisis. Imperialism or patriarchy or clericalism means to belong to or to see oneself as belonging to an exclusive club. The club membership is very limited – like the extremely wealthy, or whites only, or all-male. Often times, the club is closed and secretive. It operates from the top down. It's a system of

privilege, deference and power. Members of this power elite cling to the rungs of the hierarchical ladder. They have a monopoly on information and access to others with power. They have to maintain their status at all costs, because the system thrives on power. There is accountability, but only upwards, never downwards. The ordinary folk don't have to be consulted and seldom are. In this system there is little time for dialogue or debate. And anyone who talks about reform or change is labeled as dangerous or a dreamer.

The Word of God today calls us to confront the powers of elitism. And the first place that needs to happen for us as Catholics is in the Church itself. If you've followed any of the Catholic news surrounding the current abuse crisis, you've read or heard about the tensions even among the bishops themselves about how to address it. The former papal nuncio to the United States has gone as far as to suggest that Pope Francis himself should resign. I, for one, certainly hope he doesn't, but that he holds firm to his conviction that the Church must find new ways of being in the world today – a simpler, more authentic and less hierarchical church.



Three years ago when Pope Francis visited the United States and addressed the American bishops, his words were challenging. *The path ahead*, Francis said to the bishops, *is dialogue among yourselves*,

dialogue in your presbyterates, dialogue with lay persons, dialogue with families, dialogue with society. I cannot ever tire of encouraging you to dialogue fearlessly. Do not be afraid to set out on that “exodus” which is necessary for all authentic dialogue. Otherwise, we fail to understand the thinking of others, or to realize deep down that the brother or sister we wish to reach and redeem, with the power and the closeness of love, counts more than their positions... Only the enduring allure of goodness and love remains truly convincing. Francis himself did that a few months ago when apologized for “grave errors” in the handling of sexual abuse cases in Chile, where he had adamantly defended a bishop accused of covering up abuse by the country’s most notorious pedophile priest.



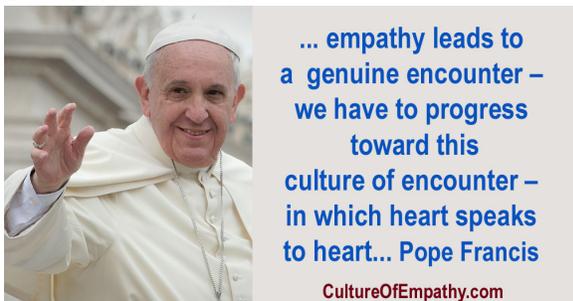
Pope Francis asked for forgiveness for the “blind spot” he had on the issue of abuse and he brought to Rome those survivors to personally ask their forgiveness for his grave errors in assessment and perception of the actions which has severely impacted their lives.

People of all walks of life and various religious convictions or no religious faith have found themselves willing to submit to the wisdom of Pope Francis, not because he issues an edict or papal decree, but because he touches our hearts and shares the best of our humanity as redeemed by Christ. He convinces us with the “allure of goodness and love.” Whereas, for so many years we’ve heard Church authorities denouncing

the “culture of death,” listing all the failures that we as human beings experience and cause, Pope Francis offers a radically different perspective as he invites us into a “culture of encounter.” Over and over that word “encounter” fills his homilies and presentations. We’ve seen it lived out firsthand as the Pope encountered homeless people at St. Patrick’s Parish in Washington, grieving survivors at Ground Zero in New York, children and immigrant families. Pope Francis has said: *The Gospels tell us how many people came up to Jesus to ask: “Master, what must we do?” The first thing that Jesus does in response is to propose, to encourage, to motivate. He keeps telling his disciples to go, to go out. He urges them to go out and meet others where they really are, not where we think they should be. Go out, again and again, go out without fear, go out without hesitation. Go out and proclaim this joy which is for all the people.*

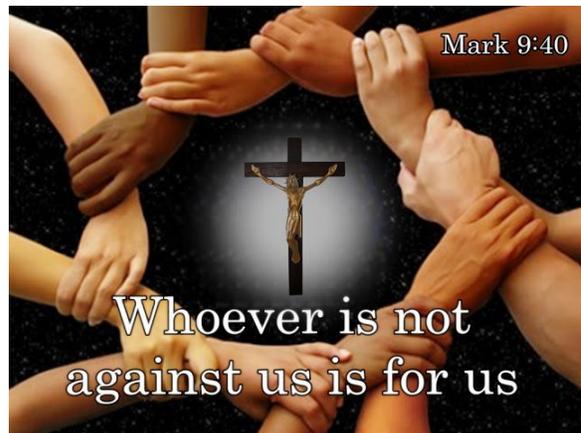
What would our homes be like, relationships between husbands and wives, conversations between parents and their teenager, classroom settings between teacher and student, relationships in offices and work places, political candidates vying for election votes, members of Congress on different sides of the aisle, leaders of nations, Palestinians and Jews, Muslim and Christian – if we were to really enter into this “culture of encounter” proposed by the Holy Father – to meet each other where the other is at, not where we think he or she should be? It would be the beginning of humble and honest dialogue. It would be “stepping out of ourselves” and entering into the lives of others without judgement or fear.

Today's scripture offers us some keen insight into the things that keep us from encountering others. Joshua, Moses' sidekick and aide is furious because it seems that these two guys, Eldad and Medad, stepped outside the tent for some fresh air just as the Lord came down and zapped the prophets with his Spirit; yet, the two outside the tent got the Spirit anyway, just like the others. In the gospel, John, likewise, is furious because somebody who hadn't paid membership dues to the "in-crowd" was doing the same things the members were doing and casting out demons. "Make him stop, Lord," was John's plea to Jesus. Both Joshua and John can represent the institution of religion and all those (us) who may think we have a monopoly on God, since we've met the qualifications and obeyed all the rules. This leads to a perennial religious problem: frustration when God declines to respect our rules and restrictions. Rather than rejoicing in the good being done, these religious leaders are offended and angry. They were jealously guarding their power as prophets and healers, much to the chagrin of Moses and Jesus.



Outside of the Catholic Church there are countless men and women in the world who do good and spend their lives working for a more dignified, just and free humanity. Jesus' Spirit is alive in them. We have to consider them as friends and allies, never as adversaries. They're not against us, for they are for human beings, as Jesus was. We

don't have a corner on the market of good deeds and helping hands. Over and again Pope Francis has modeled for us the ways of reaching out and encountering all people. At the end of some of his presentations he concludes by saying: *I ask you to pray for me and, if there are some among you who do not believe or cannot pray, I ask you please to wish me well.* What an inspiring way of respecting the differences that exist among people today and yet drawing people together in seeking the common good. May we all receive a share of that Spirit!



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