

2024 B 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time Sept. 29

There is a story of a Catholic Church that hosted for the first time a community Thanksgiving service. With great dignity the priest led his three Protestant ministers toward the sanctuary when suddenly he realized that there were no extra chairs for the guests to sit in during the service. In a state of great agitation, he whispered in the ear of one elderly layman in the pew, "Please go and get three chairs for the guest ministers."

The elderly gentleman was quite hard hearing, so he asked: "What?" The priest did say a little louder: "Please get up and get three chairs for the Protestants."

The old man has a puzzled look on his face as he rose to his feet. Turning to the rest of the congregation, he said with a loud voice: "This seems highly irregular, but I've been asked to have you stand and give three cheers for the Protestants."

I would love to have been in that congregation that day. It would have been refreshing to hear Catholics cheering the Protestants or Protestants cheering the Catholics. One of the real scandals of our faith is the animosity of some Christian groups toward other Christian groups.

Of course, Catholic Church is the true Church founded by Christ himself and has its succession to this day. It embodies the fullness of the truth guided by the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself knew that there would be some divisions. He in fact, prayed for the unity among his followers before his final sacrifice and death.

Our lesson for the day includes a rather shocking incident in the life of Jesus. John the disciple comes to Jesus and says, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he does not follow us."

"Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who performs a mighty deed in my name at the same time, speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us."

Does this passage of Scripture strike you as it does to me? To me, it represents the exact opposite of what has happened in Christian history. Jesus is preaching tolerance for others who call themselves by His Name. Meanwhile the disciples were trying to protect their brand.

And it appears to me that we, his followers, have been like Jesus' original disciples than like Him. Look at what has happened to us. In every corner of the town or city, we have different groups of Christians, and each one, of course, feels that it has a corner on the truth. God must get a good laugh out of it all if it doesn't cause Him to weep. The disciples felt that they had a privilege no one else should have.

It must have been one of those occasions that made Jesus smile, while at the same time causing him to shake his head sadly. “Do not stop him,” Jesus said, “for no one who performs a mighty deed in my name at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us.”

What a blow to the disciples’ egos. They wanted Jesus to affirm them as his only sole true representatives. Jesus was trying to expand their definition of what it means to follow Christ. He wanted them to accept people who didn’t express their faith in the same way they did. Jesus tried to expand their horizons.

He said, “For truly, if anyone who gives a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward.”

That is an interesting statement. It seems to indicate that a kind deed is more important than doctrinal purity. Think about it. Here is a man trying to help the suffering person, and he was doing this act of kindness in Jesus’ name. And all that the disciples could think about was that this guy doesn’t belong to their club.

Jesus calls us to expand our understanding of his grace and love. Christ is Lord of all the world. Wherever people offer one another a cup of cold water, he is there. They may not know his name. But he is there. And that brings us to our particular task. **We are called to introduce people to the Lord of kindness.**

Mark Twain once said, “**Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.**” Actually, kindness is the only language that communicates what it means to be the family of Christ.

Kent Millard, a pastor has given us a paraphrase of St. Paul’s beautiful homage to love in 1st Cor 13 chapter. *“I may have many wonderful qualities, but without kindness they are not enough. Kindness is love in action. Kindness is the pebble in the pond, whose ripples can change the world.*

Having the faith to move mountains is great. Having hope in bleak circumstances is wonderful. But deeds of loving kindness transform lives and last forever.”

This is crucial. **There is only one way to communicate the Gospel that truly attracts people into the family of Christ. And that is with words and works of kindness.**

Of course, the best way to witness to the Lord of kindness is through our random acts of compassion and love. This is the best way of communication of the wonder of the Gospel. It does not depend on labels or formal affiliations for validation.