

## **Homily for the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time - Year B**

**9:30,11:30,5:00 St. Peter's Masses - September 26, 2021**

**Numbers 11:25-29** "The Lord took some of the spirit from Moses and put it on the seventy elders."

**Psalms 19:7-13** "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul ... and giving joy to the heart."

**James 5:1-6** "Your gold and silver have rusted, which will be evidence against you."

**Mark 9:38-48** "No one who does a deed of power in my name will be able to speak evil of me."

### **The Spirit Does What It Will**

#### **Introduction**

A great concert pianist was hired to play at an important social event. At one point he noticed a young man who had separated himself from the crowd and was just listening intently, obviously enraptured by the way he played. Finally, during a lull between pieces, the young man said, "You play so wonderfully. I wish I could play like you." The pianist looked him straight in the eye and said, "No, you don't." That was a bit of a shock. He meant it as a compliment. Finally, he asked what he meant by that criticism, to which the pianist replied, "If you really did want to play like me, you would do what I do. I practice three to five hours every day without fail. Clearly, you are not ready to do that."

I'm always impressed by people who tell their story about how they got really serious about accomplishing

something in their lives. Every single one of those people who gets down to the business of achieving some great goal: starting a business, becoming an athlete or a musician or building an important relationship. Whatever it is, every single story about a successful person has this element in it. They always have to let go of certain distractions that keep them from getting focused on their goal. It could be a truly bad habit or it could just be a time waster which, in itself is neither good nor bad.

## **Mark**

In the second part of the Gospel today, Jesus says essentially the same thing as the pianist, only this time it is about something much greater than worldly success. It is about participation in God's kingdom. That is a success story that everyone is made for. It's our destiny, but only if we embrace it. Many are going to say that they want to be part of the kingdom of God. But Jesus is going to look each of those in the eye and say, like he does in today's Gospel, "You must cut out of your life everything that will lead you away, not just to a lack of achievement, but even to hell itself.

Jesus makes it clear. Hell is real. He mentions hell more than anyone else in all of scripture. Hell is eternal separation from the God who makes us for holiness, for

joy, for heaven itself. The worst thing you can imagine doesn't compare to that loss, that suffering. And so, if anything causes you to sin, you have to be ruthless. All commentators agree, Jesus is not literally recommending limb amputation and eye gouging. Rather, we need to cut out from our lives anything sinful that our hands can do, anything sinful towards which our feet can take us or, possibly most relevant in the internet age, anything ungodly that our eyes can see on the internet with one or two clicks of a mouse.

Jesus is very explicit. A person is obliged to avoid occasions of sin, just as much as he or she is obliged to avoid sin itself. The eternal good of our soul is more important than any good in this world. Therefore, anything that places us in close danger of committing sin should be cut off, gouged out and thrown away.

Listening to Jesus say these things would likely have reminded the Jews listening to him of the stories from the Maccabean period of their history, when the Seleucids, an offshoot of the Greek empire, had literally cut off the limbs of Jews who would not reject their faith practices. The passage I love most is when a young man, one of seven brothers, faced with this option by the king, holds up his hands and says: "I received these from heaven, and from

the Lord I hope to get them back again." Now that's faith. That's desiring the greater good and being willing to give up a lesser good to obtain the greater good.

Today, Christians are still being martyred for faith. A formal investigative report indicates that persecution aimed at Christians is increasing at an alarming rate. In 2019, an average of 11 Christians are killed for their faith around the world every day, 3000 to 6000 annually.

But most of us won't be called to this. Jesus isn't interested in having us maim ourselves but cutting off limbs or gouging out our eyes. It's clearly really about the things we do with those limbs and those eyes. What behaviours need to be cut off or gouged out. We aren't likely going to become fully the disciples and the people God has made us to be: joy filled, humble, able to love, unless we cut certain things out of our life.

James gives us an example. He tells us that our very possessions may be our undoing. In fact, he says, if we do not do what we can to help those in need, to do works of justice, our very riches will be rotten, and will lead us to hell.

## **Some of the Spirit**

True success in this life and for eternity are always animated by the Spirit of God. This is the spirit Jesus sent to the believers of all time, to teach and inspire us. We have two delightful events which tell us something about how that spirit works.

Moses was overwhelmed with the responsibility of leading the entire Israelite people. He had appointed 72 to share in this responsibility. It was a kind of ordination. That ordination was affirmed because those 72 were inspired to prophecy, to speak of God and of heavenly things.

Then there were these other two, who weren't at the big ceremony, but they got the spirit anyway. So Joshua, who is Moses' devoted man, gets jealous on behalf of Moses. But Moses himself has total humility in this regard. It's not about me, he essentially says. God is for everyone.

Like Joshua in the time of Moses, the Apostle John gets upset for Jesus that someone outside their group is casting out demons in Jesus' name. Jesus says the same thing as Moses. Don't stop them. They are casting demonic activity out of those who are troubled. They are using the name and power of Jesus. Both of those are good. Let it go.

And so we see that Jesus is the new Moses. His humility and generosity extend even to those who may be outside his little group, but are doing the works of justice in the name of God.

Where does the spirit go or upon whom does it rest? The seventy-two get some of it. Eldad and Medad get some of it. Later those preaching in Jesus' name will get some of it. God's spirit will not be controlled by us or anyone else. Our choice will only be whether to let that spirit transform our lives.

### **Call To Action**

Today, God's spirit wants to rest on all who are ready to receive him and to act in his name. This spirit will not force itself on you or I. It won't happen just because you came today, although that matters. It certainly won't happen just because of any words I might say. This may not sound right, but it won't even happen just because of the words of the mass or participation in the Eucharist. The Gospel tells us from the lips of Jesus that it will happen in two ways: either following the Lord, watching him, listening to him and seeking to live his life. That's a disciple. It will also happen for those whose hearts are moved to do good for others.

For us here today, why not both? Why not open our hearts to the spirit's desire to drive out the demons of discouragement and hopelessness in others? Secondly, why not draw closer to Jesus, whose promise is to send that Spirit with power into all who will follow him in life and in death, in suffering and persecution. That's where the mass comes in. It is food and strength for those challenges.

There is a part of us that we might need to let go if we are to make the action of the Spirit the centre of our lives. What will we do? What will we stop doing? What will we be willing to cut off or cut out of our lives today.

God is ready to invest in your life and mine. God is waiting for some kind of readiness to receive, not just some of his spirit, but the fullness of the Holy Spirit of God, who wants to operate in your life and to transform it. I wish I could have that spirit, you say? Ok, let's make it our priority. Let's do something today to make ourselves ready to receive that Holy Spirit.

## Key Passages

**Entrance Antiphon:** *All that you have done to us, O Lord, you have done with true judgment, for we have sinned against you and not obeyed your commandments. But give glory to your name and deal with us according to the bounty of your mercy.*

**Collect:** *O God, bestow, we pray, your grace abundantly upon us.*

**Numbers:** *The Lord took some of the spirit that was on Moses and put it on the seventy elders. They prophesied, but did not do so again. Eldad and Medad remained and the spirit rested on them, so they prophesied. Joshua said, "My lord, Moses, stop them! But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!"*

**Psalm:** *The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The ordinances of the Lord are true. By them is your servant warned, in keeping them there is great reward. Clear me from hidden faults. The precepts of the Lord are right, and give joy to the heart.*

**James:** *Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted. Your gold and silver have rusted, which will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. The wages of the labourers which you kept back by fraud, cry out and those cries have reached the ears of the lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure. You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.*

**Mark:** John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand or your foot or your eye causes you to stumble, cut it off (tear it out). It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one foot/hand/eye than to have two and to be thrown into hell.