

FEBRUARY 19, 2022
Memorial of St. Polycarp, Bishop & Martyr
James 4: 13-17; Mark 9: 38-40

“WHOEVER IS NOT AGAINST US IS FOR US.”

To plan for our future is good but focussing on the here and now, finding God in the present situation and responding to Him is better. This is the message of our First Reading, the Letter of St. James. According to him, there is the fragility of the life here on earth and focusing all our energies and strength on a future by sitting down to make great fortune on business, fame and success and built everything on dreams and plans, is a total waste of time. St. James said: “Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”¹ We have no idea what kind of life ours will be tomorrow or next month or next year. We see this happening everyday – lives full of dreams and plans, full of promises and possibilities but wiped out in seconds, gone for ever. “What James suggests instead of arrogant ambition is that we say, ‘If the Lord wills it, we shall live to do this or that.’ We are totally in His hands, and we do not know what the next hour or the next minute will bring, let alone the next day or the next year. The truly wise person is the one who concentrates on the here and now, who finds God in the present moment and responds to Him there. Our future is built on what we do and are right now. And God is to be sought never in the past or the future but only in the present. And God’s will is to be found in the realities – not the daydreams – of our daily lives. This is not to exclude all forms of planning in our lives. Not to plan in certain areas would be quite irresponsible. But all our planning must be in conformity with the Christian vision of life and totally contingent on developments beyond our control. We may plan for the future but, in seeking and finding God, we come back to the here and now.”²

While in our gospel, Jesus taught His followers not to be exclusive. We must open to those who preach and act on goodness of God as 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

¹ James 4: 14 Holy Bible NRSVCE Canadian Bible Society

² livingspace.sacredspace.ie

not against us is for us.”³ “This is a principle we need to take seriously to heart. There can be a strong temptation among us to a kind of exclusivity. Many Christian groups (both Catholic and people from other denominations) can fall into this trap. As Paul tells us in one of his letters, the word of God is not bound. God can do his work through all kinds of people – Christians and people of other religions and of no religion. He may even work at times through people who are ostensibly anti-religious. Far from being resentful of others doing work which we feel belongs only to Christians, we should be overjoyed. This is a clear sign of the Kingdom at work. Wherever there is love, wherever there is service, there is God. Membership of our group is not the test. The test is whether what others do fits in with our goals of truth, love, justice, compassion, freedom, peace, non-violence and so on. Our God is to be found in all these things. The Church is a way to a further goal; it is not itself the end. It is called to be a sign of the Kingdom but is not the totality of the Kingdom. The goal is the Kingdom, and the Church is working – and not exclusively – for the realisation of the Kingdom.”⁴

St. Polycarp believed in this principle when he authenticated orthodox teachings of the Apostles after they died. He had a direct connection with the apostle John. He was a second century bishop of Smyrna, a town on what is now the west coast of Turkey and lay north of the important city of Ephesus. He “occupies an important place in the history of the Christian Church. He is among the earliest Christians whose writings survive and because of his close contacts with Jesus’ disciples. He was also an elder of an important congregation in an area where the apostles had worked. He appears, from surviving accounts, to have been a practical leader and gifted teacher rather than a scholar.”⁵

So, like St. Polycarp, let us be strong defender of the teaching of Jesus based on love, compassion and mercy, do our work and focus in here and now. St. Polycarp pray for us.

³ Mark 9: 39-40 Holy Bible NRSVCE Canadian Bible Society

⁴ livingspace.sacredspace.ie

⁵ *ibid*