

Homily for Saturday of the 8th Week of Ordinary Time
 Jude 17–25
 Psalm 63:2–6
 Mark 11:27–33

Robert Fulghum, who wrote "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten," says that he placed alongside the mirror in his bathroom a picture of a woman who is not his wife. That's risky business! Every morning as he stood there shaving, he looked at the picture of that woman.

The picture? The picture is of a small humped-over woman wearing sandals and a blue eastern robe and head dress (sari). She is surrounded by important-looking people in tuxedos, evening gowns, and the regalia of royalty. It is the picture of Mother Teresa, receiving the Nobel Peace Prize!

Fulghum said he keeps that picture there to remind him that, more than a president of any nation, more than any chief executive officer of a major corporation, that woman has authority because she is a servant.

This theme of servanthood is at the heart of Mark's Gospel. Mark has a particular focus on Jesus the Servant. Today we read of the authorities in the Jerusalem Temple challenging Jesus ; they want to know by what authority is he doing these things. What was he doing? He was challenging the way the Temple was being run. Rather than its leaders exhibiting servant leadership, it had become a place of self-serving leadership.

This is always the challenge in the Church too. Those who claim to be serving God and his people can actually use their positions to serve themselves. This is a caution Jude directs our way in today's Epistle:

In the last time there will be scoffers, indulging their own ungodly lusts."¹⁹ It is these worldly people, devoid of the Spirit, who are causing divisions.

Now on first hearing you might think Jude is referring to those outside of the Church. But clearly he is referring to those in the Church because they are causing divisions. Why? They are self-preoccupied and worldly people devoid of the Spirit. In other words they will not acknowledge the servant authority of Jesus who works in those by the Holy Spirit who truly desire to serve others. No these ones scoff at the Lord and his teaching just like those in the Temple would not recognize Jesus' authority.

Contrast this self-serving attitude with those who, like Mother Theresa did in her life, recognize the servant authority of Jesus:

But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit;²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

False teaching always tears down whereas true teaching always builds up. Here Jude says that we are built up when we receive the teaching of the Church with the kind of humility open to the Holy Spirit. He calls this teaching "the most holy faith." It is this holy faith, inspired by the Holy Spirit that keeps us in

the love of God in the present and also allows us to have the kind of hope that looks forward to the mercy we will experience when we will ultimately see Jesus face to face.

In the doxology that ends his letter we are given fuller insight into how being kept in the love of God prepares us for fulling knowing and experiencing the mercy of Jesus.

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing.

Those built up in their faith keep themselves in the love of God and are then kept by God from falling back into the ways worldliness. As well they look forward to that day when without blemish, that is any trace of sin, they will stand in Jesus' presence rejoicing.

What characterizes the lives of those who kept in the love of God, anticipate the mercy of Jesus? Such people are merciful in how they relate to others:

²² And have mercy on some who are wavering; ²³ save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear, hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies.

Who are these? The first are those the church who are struggling with their faith and with living a godly life. The second group are those who have strayed to the point that the flames of judgment's fire are licking at their souls. Those "stained" with the "garment" of "the flesh," probably refer to those involved in immoral activities.

Despite the inherent dangers involved, Jude calls Christians to exercise this ministry of mercy—with care—in order to rescue those who are in various stages of separation from the [†]grace of God.

Such mercy was what motivated Blessed Mother Theresa and infused her life with such authority. May our Blessed Mother Mary pray for us who sang out in her Magnificat:

His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

We ask her prayers so that this kind of merciful authority will characterize St. Peter's so that we are increasingly known at as a community of mercy.