

## TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 30, 2018 B

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask Him to help us to hear the Word He wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** *Father, thank you for gathering us together to share life and your Word. Open our minds and hearts to hear the Word you want us to take with us today. Open our hearts to the surprising ways of your Spirit. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Response to last week's Word:** *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week. Did the Word impact your thinking and/or behavior? Did change occur and how was it?*

**Facilitator:** In this *fourth lesson* on the characteristics of true discipleship, we are told that *faithful discipleship* involves openness to the surprising movement of the Spirit, solidarity with the poor, avoiding occasions of sin, and not causing others to sin.

*Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is He wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a Word, you may want to write it down to remember.*

Read the assigned Scripture readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider reading the commentary after each reading, if you have not done so prior to your meeting.

### FIRST READING: Numbers 11:25-29

Both Joshua and John in today's Gospel are guilty of the sin of intolerance. They want to control the Spirit. They seem to think that the Spirit can only move in people belonging to *their group*.

In the verses leading up to this reading, Moses is complaining to God about being overworked. In response, God orders Moses to choose 70 elders to whom he will grant a share of the Spirit which he has given to Moses.

Two elders are missing from the meeting (perhaps they are sick or taking their grandkids to Little League!). Nevertheless, God grants them a portion of his Spirit. Somehow, Joshua (Moses' associate pastor) is not happy with God's action and wants Moses to silence the two elders. Moses answers: *"I will not! Joshua, are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the people of God were prophets."* But happily, it is a successful volunteer sign-up Sunday for Moses gets himself 70 new helpers!

### RESPONSORIAL PSALM 19

This Psalm seeks to extol the Law. We must remember that for the Israelites, the Law is primarily seen as

directives for living a full and God-fearing life. Love for the Law is like love for the will of God.

### SECOND READING: James 5:1-6

This reading is a blunt, "in-your-face" condemnation of those who put their trust in material wealth and of employers who become rich by failing to pay their employees a fair wage.

It seems many of the people in James' community are very preoccupied with acquiring material wealth. James' word to them is: *"Such wealth is not lasting. It is foolish to use one's energies seeking it. Instead, we should spend our energies accumulating lasting treasure."* James' exhortation is intensified by his admonition that the *parousia* (Jesus' Second Coming) is imminent. In the next world, material wealth will count for nothing. In powerful imagery, James visualizes the rich who enjoy their wealth and do not share with the poor as being "fattened for the day of slaughter," the Day of Judgment.

### GOSPEL PROCLAMATION: Mark 9: 38-43, 45, 47-48

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

A participant reads the Gospel then all pause to reflect...

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to write down the Word you hear.*

A participant reads the Gospel again then all pause to reflect...

### **GOSPEL COMMENTARY: Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48**

*Let us now read the Gospel commentary privately.*

Jesus gives four declarations on faithful discipleship:

- The *first declaration* (v 38-41) connects the Gospel to the first reading. In both readings, Jesus and Moses tell the people that God can work outside of institutions or some “in groups.” One doesn’t need to be a member of the Twelve to perform an exorcism. Jesus’ words remind us of a saying attributed to St. Augustine: “*God has many whom the Church does not have. The Church has many whom God does not have.*” Jesus’ saying, “*Whoever is not against us is for us,*” is a good principle to follow in ecumenical dialogue with both Christians and non-Christians.
- In the *second declaration* (v.41), Jesus says that all who support missionaries will be rewarded.
- The *third declaration* (vv 42-44) concerns bringing scandal, especially to children: “*Whoever causes these little ones to sin....*” To commit sin is bad enough; to cause another to fall into sin is worse. (See the Catechism, paragraph 2284-2285 for strong words on the gravity of causing scandal.)
- In the *fourth declaration*, Jesus uses a “surgical metaphor” to speak about the importance of avoiding occasions of sin. Jesus is not proposing self-mutilation of hands, feet and eyes. He is rather saying that if there is anything in our lives that comes between us and our relationship with God, it must be rooted out. This may be as painful as a surgical operation, like cutting out a part of our own body, but if we are to experience happiness and peace, it must be done. Jesus ends by saying that spiritual surgery is certainly preferable to Gehenna (hell).  
Some of us may struggle with the question of how a good and loving God could send someone to hell. Regarding this question, Scripture scholar Mary Healy

writes, “*The truth conveyed in Jesus’ teaching is that we choose our own destiny. With every decision and action over the course of a lifetime we orient ourselves either to heaven or to hell, and at the moment of death we embrace what has truly become our choice.* C. S. Lewis expresses it well: “*There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. But God never ceases to hold out his unfathomable mercy, even at the very moment when a person steps over the threshold into eternity.*” (Gospel of Mark p. 192).

### **FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS**

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse in the Gospel caught your attention. Why?

**Share the next questions in small groups of 2 or 3 or with the whole group.**

2. In our readings today, both Jesus and Moses condemn intolerance as restricting the way God can work. Can you name some instances where the Spirit is at work in people that we may not see or notice?

3. What are some ways that we or other Christians can give scandal to others? Name ways that parents and other adults can scandalize children.

4. What helps you to cut out of your lives a behavior that is hindering your growth in Christ?

5. What is one thing Jesus is saying to us in this Sunday’s Gospel about how a disciple should speak or act? And what do you need to do or change to be a better disciple?

**JOURNALING:** *Having listened to the Word of God, let us now take some quiet moments to write down what is coming to us. What are you hearing God say to you? Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as He asks of you. Go wherever the Spirit leads you.*

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Consider sharing with one other person how you can act on or respond to the message of this Sunday’s Gospel. Suggestions: Take time to name “occasions of sin” or real sources of temptation for you. Pray for

guidance on what you need to do to avoid these situations and temptations.

**SHARE PRAYER RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD:**

Share a prayer, however brief on the Gospel you have just heard, discussed and journaled about. For example: *Lord, help me to keep my eyes fixed on you since you have the words of everlasting life.* Or: *Lord, when I want to grumble help me to remember all the blessings in my life.* In other words, the prayer at this time should flow from the readings. (Consider standing in a circle and hold hands.)

**CONCLUDE WITH A PRAYER OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION:**

*Let us now share personal prayers of petition (prayers for self) and intercession (prayers for others).*

Pray especially for protection against intolerance, occasions of sin, scandal, and a heart for social justice issues.

**CONCLUDE WITH A SONG ©**