

Sunday 29th September 2024

The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity

Gospel Reading

Mark 9.38-50

Another Exorcist

³⁸ John said to him, ‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.’ ³⁹ But Jesus said, ‘Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰ Whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

Temptations to Sin

⁴² ‘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. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

⁴⁹ ‘For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.’

Other Readings: Esther 7.1-6,9,10; 9.20-22 Psalm 124 James 5.13-20

Homily

Another exorcist

Just before the scene that begins today’s reading, Jesus has been teaching about true greatness, demonstrated by humility and simple faith – “whoever welcomes [a little child] in my name welcomes me” he says. Now, we find that John is more concerned that a stranger is using Jesus’ name in ministry, someone who is not one of Jesus’ disciples. They told them to stop. But Jesus told them not to stop him, pointing out that anyone who had just demonstrated the power of his name, could not immediately speak against him. A godly act that honours Jesus will bring glory to God, whoever performs it. Like John, we might question some forms of Christian ministry if they don’t fit in with our particular church culture, faith or experience. It is not for us to judge. If the name of Jesus is honoured, people will be drawn to him – and that is all for the good. No single group or person has a monopoly on what God might do.

Temptations to Sin

Jesus carries on, using striking and upsetting language to warn of dire consequences to those who might mislead and corrupt innocent lives. Children are trusting and vulnerable. They need protection, reassurance and responsible, loving guidance. Our Safeguarding Training, procedures and awareness are designed to protect them, and other vulnerable groups.

Jesus moves attention to the consequences of temptation and personal sin. He takes this very seriously indeed and uses some of his most extreme language in warning us to avoid temptation and sin. He compares its seriousness to gangrene, where only radical measures will save a life. He exaggerates his language for emphasis, not expecting us to maim, mutilate or blind ourselves, but to warn us to steer away from situations that invite temptation and sin. He quotes the last verse of Isaiah, referring to “Gehenna”, Jerusalem’s Hinnom Valley, the city’s rubbish dump, where refuse rots and burns. A vivid picture of hell. In the end, if we do not repent and persist in rejecting God’s grace, we will be excluded from God’s Kingdom, the home of God’s presence and glory.

However, the Gospel proclaims God’s way for our salvation and forgiveness. We don’t need to labour, punish or mutilate ourselves to find life, because Jesus gave his life for us – and was raised from death. Forgiveness is freely offered to us – but it is not cheap. Jesus’ suffering and death demonstrate just how much it cost him to win our salvation. In following him, we are freed from the power and consequences of sin and can know God as our Heavenly Father. Our part is to commit ourselves to faith in Jesus; to trust and honour him as Saviour and Lord of our lives.

Staying ‘Salty’

Salt purifies, preserves and seasons. Jesus encourages us to purify our lives and to turn away from temptations and sin by not putting ourselves in the way of temptation. Our shared commitment to him brings unity and peace between us. We are to be ‘the salt of the earth’ the distinctive influence of Christ to those around us. St Paul calls this saltiness, ‘the aroma of Christ’.

Conversation Questions

1. Can we think of words, attitudes or behaviour that set a bad example to children or vulnerable people?
2. How can we keep ourselves clean and ‘salty’; ready to carry the presence of Jesus in our conduct, decisions and relationships?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

Almighty and everlasting God,
increase in us your gift of faith
that, forsaking what lies behind
and reaching out to that which is before,
we may run the way of your commandments
and win the crown of everlasting joy;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

God, our judge and saviour,
teach us to be open to your truth
and to trust in your love,
that we may live each day
with confidence in the salvation which is given
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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