

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time B - The Grace of Our Eldads and Medads

September 29, 2024

I believe most of you reading my weekly Sunday reflections have been faithful Catholics throughout your lives, attending Mass weekly from your earliest days, living a moral life fighting temptations and seeking forgiveness for the times you've failed. You have also searched for ways that you can serve God in others, particularly in your families. Most of you do not just go to Church on Sundays, you pray everyday. As human beings you fall, but you also rise up again through the sacraments. Most of you are happy members of the Catholic Church. You see how the Holy Spirit continually works in the Church. You see God's presence in St. Teresa of Calcutta, St. John Paul II and all the saints. You witness the determination of Catholic Relief Services and the Campaign for Human Development to care for the poor and see God working in organizations like Chalice Canada. Yes, you are disappointed and saddened by the priests and religious who have not been faithful to their vocations causing scandals, but you witness hundreds of other dedicated servants of the Church.

Catholic Church is the original Christian Church and has been faithful to Christ for two thousand years. But the Lord is working in other faiths too. So many determined Christians of various religions, so many faith-filled people who do not confess Jesus Christ, are living for God, serving Him in the poor. In the conference, "Holiness Today," sponsored by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints held on Oct. 3-6, 2022, Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, prefect of the dicastery, announced the creation of a commission that will recognize Christians who, although not canonized and perhaps not Catholic, were exemplary and even heroic witnesses to the Christian faith. An example of a Christian witness of faith, he said, is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran Pastor and theologian who was killed in 1945 for his opposition to Nazism. Although the Catholic Church does not proclaim him a martyr because he was not Catholic, Bonhoeffer remains "an emerging figure as a Christian witness," the cardinal said. "Like Bonhoeffer, there are many others. Holiness is not always immediately evident in the eyes of the faithful. Our service is to highlight it...It is necessary to show that holiness is not far from us but is a call that concerns everyone. It is not necessary to be canonized, but we must respond to the call to holiness." The Soup Kitchen in Fort McMurray Baptist Church downtown is a good example for reaching out to the poor and homeless. We recognize the spiritual leadership of Mahatma Ghandi, a Hindu, Martin Buber, a Jew, and of course Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran Pastor. We see how God worked through Billy Graham; how he reaches out to others in song through the Pentecostal group Hillsong United. We see how Rick Warren, an American Baptist Evangelical Christian Pastor and author, the founder of an evangelical Baptist mega Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California with nearly 20,000 people in attendance each week. The Saddleback Church is well established throughout the world including Hong Kong. The Holy Spirit is alive and well in the world working through those within the Catholic Church, and those within the universal Church who themselves do not share in the seven sacraments or might not even believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus made it clear that all good comes from God the Father and that doing charitable work was not the exclusive right of his followers. God moves where he wills and chooses whom he wills. His spirit is at work beyond the confines of established religion.

In this Sunday's first reading (Numbers 11:25-29) Eldad and Medad were not in the tent. They weren't present with the 70 who received the Spirit from Moses. Yet, Eldad and Medad still received the Spirit. "Stop them," Joshua said. "Why?" asked Moses. "Would that all the people shared in the Spirit". In the Gospel reading (Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48), a man was baptizing in the name of Jesus. He was not one of the Twelve. Perhaps he heard Jesus speak and wanted to spread the Gospel. "Stop him," John said. "Why?" asked Jesus. "He is doing good work." We are graced to live in the age of the Spirit. This wonderful time began when the Father and the Son sent the Spirit upon the world. He is the Spirit of God. He is the action of God. He transforms the world by working in the hearts of all good people. And thus, in the Vatican II document, The Church in the Modern World, the Catholic Church declared that all who are open to God, who are following their consciences, are themselves, in fact, members of the Church, saved by Jesus Christ. Eldad and Medad may not have been in the tent. But the Spirit still empowered them. The Spirit is present in the Church. Jesus is present in the Blessed Sacrament. But the Spirit is also present where we, foolish human beings with our feeble attempts to limit God's power, least expect to find Him. Eldad and Medad were not in the tent. A man baptizing in Jesus' name was not one of the Twelve. How can this be? No one can harness the Spirit. He is God, the action of Love

that has been unleashed upon the world through the Gift of the Father and the Sacrifice of the Son. We thank God today for the wonders of the Holy Spirit, in our lives, in our Church and in the world. We have to know that an action can be good and Godly without being performed by a Christian. Goodness in the world comes from God and not from men.

Solanus was born in Wisconsin (USA) in 1870 and died in Detroit, Michigan, in 1957. He came from a farming family, but his pioneering spirit led him to travel around the Wild West, taking on various jobs before finally discerning his call to the priesthood. One of those jobs brought him into contact with Jim and Cole Younger, two famous gunfighters who worked for Jesse James and his gang. Solanus' kindness so impressed the outlaws that Cole Younger gave him a present of a clothing trunk, which the future priest brought with him to seminary. At the seminary, Solanus failed so many classes that he was invited to leave. But he succeeded on a second try, when he joined the Capuchin Franciscans in Detroit. He was ordained in 1904, but his academic performance was so poor that it disqualified him from hearing confessions and of giving formal sermons. Solanus spent his nearly fifty years as a priest working as the doorkeeper (porter) in various Capuchin parishes from Harlem to Detroit. He would welcome the poor and the homeless, as well as the affluent - whoever came to the parish in need. Soon he also gained a reputation as a healer, and started attracting Protestants and Jews as well as Catholics. As his reputation spread, people came to him by the thousands, looking for comfort, advice, and healing. The growing demands of his ministry simply wore him out. Often, after a gruelling day of counselling, he would fall asleep on the floor of his office or in the church, or be found at two or three in the morning trying to wind down by playing his fiddle in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Venerable Solanus Casey had major human limitations, but he was so filled with grace that his life became a roaring waterfall spreading God's goodness.

Like Solanus, our slightest (or mightiest) good deed done for God or for his Kingdom will not go unrewarded - even if it's only giving a glass of water to someone who is thirsty. Our King lavishes his blessings on everyone who lets him; we, as his followers, ought to do the same. Unfortunately, many times we, like the Apostle John in this passage, are less generous than our Lord, and concern ourselves with hoarding the grace of God. Sometimes we refuse to give freely to others what we have freely received from God (cf. Matthew 10:8). Other times we envy the good that others are doing, as if it somehow is detracted from the good we are doing or made us look bad. But it is not for us to limit the range of divine benevolence by our pettiness. Rather, it is for us to extend it, to encourage whatever good is being done anywhere, whether or not we get the credit. We have witnessed unhealthy rivalry between different church organizations, different parishes, even different interest groups within a parish and yet the aim of all is about furthering the kingdom of God. The exchange between St John and Jesus seems like a small one, but it actually gives us a glimpse into the very heart of God. God is pure goodness, pure generosity. In the Middle Ages, the philosophers had a phrase that expressed this: *bonum diffusivum est sui*, meaning goodness naturally spreads itself to others. Think of the sun and the stars. It is their nature to shine, to spread light and warmth; that's just what they do. It is similar with God. It is his nature to shine with goodness, to spread goodness; he is always surrounding us with signs of his love, always wanting to fill our hearts with wisdom, grace, mercy, and virtue. Every good deed comes from God and it contributes towards the battle against evil. We as Christians should not see ourselves as belonging to a privileged club. God's action is not limited to any class of people. The gospel tells us that any person of goodwill doing their best to follow Christ's footsteps graces the world. God may be sending his message to us in the most unexpected and tragic events that befall us. Goodness is where we find it.