

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Year B: Num 11:25-29; Ps 19; Jam 5:1-6; Mk 9:38-43, 45, 47-48
September 26, 2021
Fr. David Pignato

Both in the first reading and in the Gospel passage for this Sunday, we hear a clear message that we should welcome and encourage anyone who wishes to contribute to the service of Christ. In the first reading, Joshua complained to Moses that other men who were not among their gathering were also prophesying in the spirit of the Lord. And the response of Moses was, “*Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets! Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit on them all!*” Then in the Gospel, St. John complained to Jesus that someone who was not among their group was driving out demons in His name. And Jesus replied, “*Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us.*”

The message for us from Sacred Scripture is that we should be willing to recognize and respect whatever we hold in common with others, especially when it comes to matters of faith and service to God. In fact, we should be looking for what we hold in common with others to find ways to cooperate in the service of Christ.

When we seek common ground with people of other faiths, we can't be naïve about real differences of religious belief that might exist, such as different beliefs about whether the Eucharist is the real Body and Blood of Christ. Sometimes, people want us to gloss over these differences and pretend they don't matter. We can never do that, because we must always be faithful to what Christ taught us. But we can still be on the lookout for shared beliefs, especially with other Christians, and be open to collaboration with those who sincerely believe in Christ and love Him and seek to serve Him.

For example, members of the Orthodox Churches of the East share with us a faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the importance of devotion to Mary as the Mother of God. They also remind us to recognize and appreciate the role that the Holy Spirit plays in our sanctification, the importance of divine worship and the value of monastic vocations (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 15). And here in our own country, many of the evangelical Christians, especially in the southern states, share our moral beliefs about abortion and assisted-suicide, the truth of marriage as the union of a man and a woman, and the right of religious

freedom. They may disagree with us about many matters of religious doctrine, but they are our greatest allies in the effort to promote public morality, and they deserve to be recognized for their love and honor of Christ as the Savior of the world and their great devotion to Sacred Scripture.

St. Paul also learned the importance of seeking common ground with those who believe in Christ, even if everything is not always held in common, and even if religious motives are not always as they should be. In his Letter to the Philippians, he said, *“Of course, some preach Christ from envy and rivalry, others from good will. The latter act out of love, aware that I am here for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not from pure motives, thinking that they will cause me trouble in my imprisonment. What difference does it make, as long as in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed? And in that I rejoice”* (Phil 1:15-18).

As Catholics, we have an obligation to understand and adhere to the truths of our faith which have been passed down to us through the centuries, often as a result of great sacrifice by those who suffered to defend the truths that Christ taught us. We cannot be superficial or callous about the importance of accurate belief and the proper interpretation of Divine Revelation. But, at the same time, we should recognize and appreciate what others believe in common with us, and we should encourage anyone anywhere to give praise to Jesus Christ. As Christ said, *“[W]hoever is not against us is for us.”*

Differences of religious belief are always important, both to us as Catholics, and to members of other faiths. But honest recognition of these differences should never lose sight of what is held in common. As the Second Vatican Council taught in regard even to non-Christian religions, *“The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men”* (*Nostra Aetate*, 2).

The message for us from Sacred Scripture this week is that there should never be any jealousy or competition in the service of Christ. If we see others doing the work of God and giving glory to God, we should rejoice that the Holy Spirit is sowing seeds of truth in the world. As Jesus said, *“[W]hoever is not against us is for us.”* And as St. Paul, said, *“What difference does it make, as long as in every way ... Christ is being proclaimed? And in that I rejoice.”*