

Readings

Nm 11:25-29

Ps 19:8,10, 12-13, 14

Jas 5:1-6

Mk 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

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There are many types of Gospels in which Jesus presents his teachings in different ways. Sometimes he uses parables, or stories, which may challenge us to look not at the message on the surface but the deeper meaning to the words. At times Jesus is very direct – there is no gray area. The Gospel today is such a time. Listen to it and how Jesus speaks to us.

Today, Jesus does what he does so often, he challenges us. He does it in two ways. The first is seen in his words, “There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me.” His message so often was to imitate how he lived and treated others. Jesus responded to people in need. He cured the sick, he fed the hungry, he consoled the sorrowful, he spoke out against injustice, he embraced the unloved, he ate with sinners. He constantly gives the same challenge to us in our everyday life. Do we perform these mighty deeds in our lives, do we do it in the name of Jesus, do we do it because it is a natural living extension of the faith we profess? Jesus responded to the needs of others, but he so beautifully sought out people in need, not just those who were in front of him, but those who suffered in silence on the sidelines. Again, do we do these mighty deeds in our lives in the name of the faith we profess?

Jesus gives us a very simple but beautiful example of doing great deeds even in a small way in his name when he says, “Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward.” What little it takes, what little it demands of us to accept the challenge of Jesus to live as he calls us in faith.

That was the first challenge in the Gospel, but Jesus challenges us in another way about how we live when it is not from faith. He gives the example: if you lead a child or innocent one into sin it is better you put a millstone around your neck and be thrown into the sea. If your foot is an occasion of sin, cut it off. If your eye is an occasion of sin, pluck it out. He spares no condemnation of our sinfulness and how we must avoid it. When I have heard this Gospel it always leads me to reflect in my imagination as to what I would look like if I followed this word by word. Humanity around us would look very different.

The Gospel shows us the two sides to the reality of our lives and faith. Jesus gives us the challenge to choose how we will live, how it will reflect the faith we profess. Do we choose the life of service to others or do we choose the part of the Gospel where we would be disfigured?