

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 26th 2021
A Reflection by Fr Sylvester O’Flynn OFM Cap., Rochestown, Cork

Christian by name and in deed

The Sunday Gospels these weeks are about Jesus on the way to Calvary and how his followers are to take up their crosses also. Today’s Reading (Mark 9:38-43. 45.47-48) is a challenge to be Christian not only in name but also in the way we live. Do I belong to Christ or to the rubbish dump?

The apostle John had a problem because “a man who was not one of us” was casting out devils in Jesus’ name, so “we stopped him”. But Jesus did not agree. “Anyone who is not against us is for us.” Miracles of healing are not confined to the Catholic Church. Retreat Centres host ways of meditating, breathing exercises and gentle movement which are not specifically Christian but neither are they anti-Christian. I know from experience in a Retreat Centre that people object to these retreat on the grounds that they worship a false god. These exercises are bringing great inner peace and healing to people. Inner demons of violence, addiction, anxiety and fear are being cast out. Remember what Jesus said: “Anyone who is not against us is for us.” The apostle John wanted to stop the man who was healing because “he was not one of us.” But years later, the more mature John in his First Epistle wrote that “God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him”. God’s presence, love and power are not confined to any one Church.

People of the Kingdom

The mission of Jesus was to establish the kingdom or reign of God on earth. The Church was to provide the taskforce of this kingdom. However, as Saint Augustine noted, there are many who belong to the Kingdom although they do not belong to any Church, while there are many who belong to the Church but not to the Kingdom. In other words, it is not enough to be Christian by name if one is not Christian in behaviour.

In last Sunday’s Gospel, Jesus held a helpless little child before the apostles to represent all the people who require care and support from true followers of Christian charity. In today’s Gospel Jesus again speaks of his little ones, this time about the scandal of those who harm children in any way.

“Anyone who is an obstacle to bring down one of these little ones who have faith, would be better thrown into the sea with a great millstone round his neck.” This must have been the strictest warning Jesus ever gave. Do not be an obstacle to the faith of anybody, but especially to the faith of an impressionable child. Perhaps Jesus could foresee the abuse of children by people who were trusted, especially by church personnel. As Shakespeare wrote, “Lilies that fester small far worse than weeds”. There is a Latin tag, *Corruptio optimi pessima*, corruption of the best is worst of all. It is only in recent times that the depth of hurt inflicted has been recognised. We must continue to pray for people who have been abused, as well as for true repentance on the part of anybody who has abused or hurt others.

Cleansing

Wherever there is corruption there is need of cleansing which, in very serious cases may require surgery. Jesus speaks of cutting off the sinful hand or foot and tearing out the sinful eye. He is not advocating self-mutilation in a literal sense. Sin does not reside in the hand or eye which is its instrument. Sin begins in the mind and the decision of the will. One of the beatitudes

tells us that the pure of heart see God. If a person's mind is filled with the light of Christ and one's will directed by what God would want, then sin will not happen.

Hands are for welcoming, for serving, giving, caressing, comforting, and healing. Praying hands come together at the level of the heart and point towards heaven in adoration and praise. Such hands belong to Christ. But hands may be violent and destructive, thieving and deluding. Such hands are already cut off from Christ and destined towards the rubbish dump called Gehenna.

Christian feet are for going on a mission to bring the light, love and joy of the Gospel to others. But feet go in the wrong direction when marching with the echoing menace of terror and destruction: or when one runs away from responsibility.

Eyes are the windows of the soul, letting in God's heavenly light in wonder, goodness and praise. But eyes might be smudged by the dirt of lust and hatred. As Jesus said, those who do evil hate the light and avoid it for fear their actions would be exposed.

Christian in name and in fact

In the sacrament of baptism, a person is claimed for Christ. Water is poured on the head as a symbol of life and the cleansing of sin. Then the Oil of Chrism anoints the person as a Christian, Christ-ened as a member of Christ's body on earth. Today's Gospel reading is a challenge. To what extent am I a Christian not only in name but also in fact? And remember that there are many in the Church who are not agents of the Kingdom, whereas there are many who work for the Kingdom although they may not belong to any Church.

Fratelli Tutti

Pope Francis has given us a beautiful Encyclical Letter, inspired by his patron, Saint Francis, on our family unity as brothers and sisters. This is his closing prayer

Prayer

O God, grant the we Christians may live the Gospel, discovering Christ in every human being, recognising him crucified in the sufferings of the abandoned and forgotten of our world, and risen in each brother and sister who makes a new start.

Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty, reflected in all your peoples of the earth, so that we may discover anew that all are important and all are necessary, different faces of the one humanity that God so loves. Amen.