

## Twenty Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

I do not know if we all know much about sectarianism. **Sectarianism is a tendency to consider more our own community, and to reject those we judge not to belong there, those whom we judge to be not ‘one of us’.** In the context of the Gospel, this is a kind of **resistance** to recognize the good, or the presence of the Holy Spirit, among those who are perceived to be **“others”**.

In today’s Gospel, the disciples display something of that attitude. John who is speaking on behalf of the other disciples, says that they tried to stop someone from doing the Lord’s work, because he wasn’t **“one of us”**, according to the Gospel. This person was clearly doing some good deeds for others, but in the eyes of the disciples, his good works had no value, because he did not belong to the community of Jesus’ disciples.

Jesus, however, had a different understanding and consideration as He says **“Anyone who is not against us is for us”**. This attitude of Jesus in this Gospel is calling us to build connections with all those who, in some ways, share the mission of the Church to bring life where there is the threat of death, to bring unity where there is brokenness and relief where there is suffering. We are called to be partners in mission with those who are **‘not one of us’** in the narrow sense.

In this Gospel, Jesus declares to his disciples that anyone who gives them a cup of cold water to drink will not lose their reward. Giving a cup of water to someone seems to be a very small gesture indeed. Yet, for someone who is really thirsty, a cup of water could be the greatest gift. Jesus is reminding us that **the smallest gesture of kindness towards someone has a very big value in the sight of God.** The smallest gesture can make present the power of God’s love. Remember what Jesus did when He fed a large multitude with a small boy’s generous gesture of sharing his few loaves and fish. With a very small gesture of love we can save the multitude!

In this same Gospel, Jesus gives us an example of behavior which is the opposite of making present the power of God’s love. He speaks of how we can be obstacles on the way of those who have faith. Jesus is very strict and critical of those whose behavior is like that, those who weaken the life and the working of the Spirit in their brothers and sisters. As Christians, our vocation is to support one another on our faith journey, to inspire one another to follow the way of God, and not to be their obstacles.

In this Gospel, **Jesus goes on to use very strong, provocative, language about those who cause others to fall, with their hand or foot or eye.** What is the meaning of cutting our feet or our hands off and plucking our eyes out? **Clearly, Jesus does not expect those to be taken out literally. He is using strong figurative language to make His message stronger.** It is as if Jesus is saying that whenever we are an obstacle to the work of the Holy Spirit in others, or to the faith of others, we become spiritually paralyzed, and that is worse than being physically crippled.

Within the community of faith, especially, Jesus wants us to help each other to grow in holiness. He knows that on the journey of discipleship, we all have something important to give to each other and receive from one another, even if that can be a ‘cup of cold water’.