

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

GOSPEL

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John said to Jesus, 'Master, we saw a man who is not one of us casting out devils in your name; and because he was not one of us we tried to stop him.' But Jesus said, 'You must not stop him: no one who works a miracle in my name is likely to speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us.

'If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink just because you belong to Christ, then I tell you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward.

'But 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. And if your hand should cause you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life crippled, than to have two hands and go to hell, into the fire that cannot be put out. And if your foot should cause you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life lame, than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye should cause you to sin, tear it out; it is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell where their worm does not die nor their fire go out.'

(Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- There are a number of well-documented examples of healers and miracle-workers who were contemporaries of Jesus.
- Hell is the English word used to translate the Hebrew Sheol or Gehenna or the Greek Hades. The idea of a particular place of punishment by fire in the afterlife developed quite late in Hebrew thought—about the third century bc.
- In the final line of this gospel, Jesus is quoting from Isaiah about the fate of those who rebel against God: 'their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched' (Isaiah 66:24).

EXPLORING THE WORD

In last week's gospel, the principal message was that to be a disciple, one must become the servant of others. This message seems to have had little impact on the disciples, as we still find them obsessed with their own position in the 'in group': 'Because he was not one of us, we tried to stop him.' The arrogance of the disciples is astounding. They have no authority to stop the spread of the kingdom! Indeed the true reward will go not to the great among them but to those who by a simple act of kindness, such as offering a cup of water, assist in the work of welcoming the kingdom.

Not only must they not hinder the spread of the reign of God by whatever means, but Jesus also warns them that they must not hinder or damage the faith of others. The difficult language of the remainder of this gospel is really designed to draw attention to the fact that the kingdom is so precious that we should be prepared to rid ourselves of anything at all that would place our attainment of it in jeopardy.

- How far are you prepared to go to attain the kingdom of God?
- Do you see yourself as drawing closer to it already?
- Jesus inaugurated the kingdom. In his ministry, he made manifest the kingdom 'at hand'. In the healing miracles, he gave the recipients of his healing an experience of the kingdom of God now in their lives; they experience the liberation promised by the kingdom. What manifestations of the kingdom among us are we able to discern in our present world?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What do you do in Jesus' name? What are the obstacles to your own faith?
- What do you need to root out of your life in order to approach the kingdom more closely?
- Identify and root out that which is an obstacle to your faith. This may not be an easy task. Pray for help in this.
- In recent times in our nation, there have been occasions when some people have rejected those who are 'not one of us'. Increasingly in our world, divisions between peoples are becoming apparent. Discuss together some examples of this. How might these divisions be healed? Think of times when you welcomed someone outside your immediate circle. Were you enriched by the experience? Was the other person? Tell the story of what happened.
- This week's opening collect is worth repeating often:

O God, who manifest your almighty power above all by pardoning and showing mercy, bestow, we pray, your grace abundantly upon us and make those hastening to attain your promises heirs to the treasures of heaven.

