

Beyond Our Group

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

September 26, 2021

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Have you ever had the experience of disagreeing with someone, not because of what they said, but just because it was coming from them? All too often, we automatically disregard something that may be true because its coming from someone we don't like. This dynamic is nothing new to human nature.

In our First Reading from the Book of Numbers, Joshua tried to stop Eldad and Medad from receiving the spirit of God and prophesying because they were not part of the gathering with Moses and the seventy elders. Since they were not part of the group, Joshua thought that they should not have received the spirit. Then, in our Gospel, John tried to stop someone 'who does not follow us' from driving out a demon in the Jesus' name. Since that individual was not part of the disciples' group, John thought that he should not have invoked the name of Jesus to drive out the demon. In both stories, the people of God tried to stop the working of God because it was coming from someone outside their group. That bothered them.

Moses and Jesus, in contrast, allowed the outsiders to do the work of God. Unlike Joshua and John, they refused to stop them. In fact, they weren't bothered by them at all. Instead, they were glad to see God at work in others. As Moses said, "would that all the people of the Lord be prophets. Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit on them all" and as Jesus said, "whoever is not against us is for us."

As Christians, we cannot be territorial when it comes to carrying out the mission of the Gospel. Lamenting the divisions within Christianity, especially among the many Protestant denominations, the saint and former archbishop of San Salvador Oscar Romero said, “we journey towards the same destiny; we are crew members on the same ship; and it is the same beacon with the same light that guides our common ship in the midst of the storms of time and life.” (*The Scandal of Redemption*, 88) Archbishop Romero’s words remind us that we are not in competition with each other and that we are ultimately moving towards the same destiny. We need to recognize the work of God, even in people I dislike. Honestly, bringing about the Kingdom of God is too large a task for any one group to accomplish anyway. God knows that much better than we do.

God can work beyond our own group.

Am I bothered or glad that God is at work in people beyond my group or gathering?

As we continue with this mass, let us pray that we may never try to stop God’s work like Joshua or John. May we not be so territorial that we are blind to the ways God is working through all different people. The next time we feel bothered by someone outside our group doing the work of God, may we say, like Moses, ‘would that all the people of the Lord be prophets. Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit on them all,’ and like Jesus, ‘whoever is not against us is for us.’