

Proper 21

*Sunday between 25 September and 1 October inclusive ·
Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time*

Principal Service readings

Numbers 11.4-6, 10-16, 24-29

The people complain about manna; the spirit inspires the elders

Psalm 19.7-14

'Keep your servant from presumptuous sins'

James 5.13-20

Send for the elders to anoint the sick

Mark 9.38-50

On using the name of Jesus; reward for generosity; on leading others astray

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

On using the name of Jesus; temptations to sin

³⁸John said to Jesus, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.' ³⁹But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰Whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

⁴²If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. ⁴³If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

⁴⁹For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.'

Mark 9.38-50 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

The strange exorcist was apparently using the name of Jesus as a kind of magical charm, and having positive results – see also 1.24; 5.7. Did the disciples merely 'prohibit' the man or did they physically prevent him operating? John says, not following *us*' (9.38). Perhaps John is failing to understand the Jesus is the source of the disciples' power. Jesus shows remarkable tolerance.

'Stumbling-block' is literally 'scandal' (*skandalon*) and is used metaphorically to refer to enticing someone to sin, and so putting an obstacle in their way of their path to discipleship. The image of a millstone is used to illustrate being 'dragged down' (9.42). Various parts of the body are mentioned as causing a scandal to oneself (9.43-48), and aspects of salt are mentioned three times (9.49-50). On the first mention, salt does not lose its flavour but it can become contaminated or diluted. On the second use, it is mentioned as a seasoning and a preservative. Perhaps there is a reference here to disciples as 'the salt of the earth' (Matthew 5.13). The third use of 'salt' (9.50) refers to making a covenant – 'you shall not omit from your grain offering the salt of the covenant with your God' (Leviticus 2.13a; see also Numbers 18.19; 2 Chronicles 13.5).

The positive message of the passage is that people who do Jesus' work without formally being his followers are 'for him', and that those showing charity such as giving a cup of water to a disciple will be rewarded.

Quotations

1

Not all religious people hold equally true doctrine, and not all who use the name of Jesus are on God's side. Indeed there are 'Churches' which

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

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are really profit-making businesses and only pretending to be Churches. In such cases Christians have a duty to show the difference between such 'mock-Churches' and genuine Christian bodies. But Christians are still to 'serve' them in love.

A guide to Mark's gospel / John Hargreaves. 1995.

2

Faith is not for overcoming obstacles; it is for experiencing them—all the way through!

Radical grace: daily meditations / by Richard Rohr. 1993

Related topics

For further study:

Ecumenism; non-violence; social justice; Christian community; reconciliation; peace and unity; conversion; discipleship; moral teaching; parochialism

Closing Prayer

Pour out your Spirit, O God, over all the world
to inspire every heart
with knowledge and love of you.

Grant that we who confess Jesus as Lord
may shun whatever is contrary to this faith
and give witness to your love
that has saved us in Christ,
for he lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers · Ordinary Time 26, Year B²

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² *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.