



The Word...

John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us."

Jesus replied, "Do not prevent him.

There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. ...

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.

(Mk 9:38-43, 45, 47-48).

Pondering the Word ...

I often want to ask Jesus: "But what about those who don't speak ill of you but who say they are speaking for you, while at the same time preach hate and incite and commit acts of violence? What are we to make of them? How are we to counteract the hijacking of your name, not for mighty deeds but for evil ones?"

There are other gospel readings this week that provide perspective, and all of this is set in the context of readings from Job. (Try not to get caught up in Monday's reading with the idea that God is letting Satan ruin Job's life. It's an allegory. God does not make deals with evil to test us, but we know evil and suffering exist.)

The point of the readings from Job is to remind us, as Qohelet did last week, that we cannot understand the perspective of God, but that doesn't mean we don't accept it. When we are faced with evil, our human nature ignites, and we want to fight fire with fire. Like Joshua and John in today's readings, we want to exclude or even punish people we see as undeserving of power. But we recognize our view is limited. We cannot know God's plan.

This does not mean we don't call out hypocrisy when we see it. Jesus made his name—and lost his life--doing just that. So did others who followed nonviolent resistance. But "violence begets violence begets violence," and if we resort to the "enemy's" tactics, we allow hate to win. In God's plan, love always wins.

"He drew a circle that shut me out—heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.

But love and I had the wit to win; we drew a circle that took him in." (Edwin Markham)

Living the Word ...

When I was a kid and someone did something mean to me, my mom would always say, "Don't lower yourself to their level." Arrgh! I would growl and complain because revenge was what I sought! At times, I did not pay attention to her wise advice and would wind up feeling awful about myself. For a person of conscience, the satisfaction of revenge is always short-lived. It is somewhat of a Catch-22: if we respond in kind to hatred, we are violating the very beliefs we say we represent. Bring these ideas to prayer this week. How can we show acceptance and love to those we believe use God's name in vain?

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Sep 30: *“Whoever receives this child in my name receives me... whoever is not against you is for you”* (Lk 9:46-50). These two phrases collided for me in a way I hope I can explain. The first brought to mind images of children, alone, arriving at borders and checkpoints, trying to escape violence and poverty. To receive and care for them is to receive and care for Christ. In the second part, Jesus is assuring John not to worry about the person casting out demons in Jesus’ name, but what came to mind was a quote from Elie Wiesel: *“We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”* If we do not take a stand against the forces who would turn these children away, then we are “for” those who do so. **Provision: Check your indifference.** Another Wiesel quote: *“The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference. ... The opposite of faith is not heresy, it’s indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it’s indifference.”* If we are indifferent, then we support the status quo. Today, let’s examine our indifference.

Tue, Oct 1: *James and John asked, “Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?” Jesus turned and rebuked them* (Lk 9:51-56). Do you wonder what Jesus says when he “rebukes” the disciples? “Gentlemen, I believe I could call down that fire myself if I wanted to! But violence in my name is against everything I stand for!” No wonder he got impatient with these guys! **Provision: Who do you allow to stand in your way of following Jesus?** I can name a few people I’d be tempted to zap. What would Jesus say to rebuke me?

Wed, Oct 2: *“Do they declare your mercy in the grave, your faithfulness among those who have perished? Are your wonders made known in the darkness, or your justice in the land of oblivion?”* (Ps 88). “Since the damned are said to suffer in the next world...they must still have enough life left in them to suffer with.... Dante saw written over the gates of hell the words ‘Abandon all hope ye who enter here,’ but he must have seen wrong. If there is suffering life in hell, there must also be hope in hell, because where there is life there is the Lord and giver of life; and where there is suffering, he is there too, because the suffering of the ones he loves is also his suffering. ‘He descended into hell,’ the Apostles’ Creed says, and ‘If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there,’ says the Psalmist (139:8). It seems there is no depth to which he will not sink” (Buechner, Frederick. *Beyond Words*, 2004).

Thu, Oct 3: *Jesus appointed seventy-two other disciples whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit* (Lk 10:1-12). I’ve mentioned I am part of the Ignatian Volunteer Corps in Baltimore, MD. Our group’s theme this year is “Companions on the Way.” I love Luke’s version of Jesus sending out a bunch of people (not just the Apostles!) in pairs. Having a companion as you bring forth the Good News makes such a difference! And I smile when I think about the towns Jesus intends to visit—not always places we would choose! **Provision: Who are your companions? Who do you companion?** Express appreciation today for the people who companion you and those you companion for their encouragement, love, and openness.

Fri, Oct 4: *“Have you ever commanded the morning and shown the dawn its place?”* (Jb 38:1, 12-21; 40:3-5). **For the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, from Pope Francis’ Laudato Sí:** *“All powerful God, you are present in the universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with your peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one. O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light. We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle, for justice, love and peace.”*

Sat, Oct 5: *“I had heard of you by word of mouth, but now my eye has seen you”* (Jb 42: 1-3, 5-6, 12-17). The Book of Job gets tedious at points, but it can be helpful if you are suffering. Job whines and complains, and God gets testy with him, but this banter opens Job’s mind and heart to see God’s majesty and make some sense out of his suffering. **Provision: Banter with God.** If we are afraid to engage God, our knowledge of God might be mostly hearsay. Our eyes and hearts can be opened if we seek to know God better. *“We are closer to God when we are asking questions than when we think we have the answers”* (Abraham Joshua Heschel). Ask the questions.