

**Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**June 26, 2022**  
**Year of Saint Joseph**

If you would indulge me, I would like to include the two verses of the gospel that came before the gospel reading today. I just feel those two sentences are an important part of the message for us. Verse 49 and 50 are: “John answered, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.” But Jesus said to him, “Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you.”

One of the primary themes in today’s gospel is Christ’s journey to complete his mission on earth. He has determined that it is time for him to go to Jerusalem. He knows the time of his passion is at hand. He knows He must go to Jerusalem to fulfill the prophesy. Mankind’s salvation depends on this journey. But one might ask, why is this particular gospel reading important to me today? Well, obviously, the words of Christ, even though 2000 years old, still apply today. They are just as relevant in our time and culture as they were in His time and culture. There are messages for us along the path he traveled. If you pay attention to the scripture, these are messages of love and truth; messages about making the right choices in our journey.

Going back to the two verses I wanted to include in today’s gospel – the man John wanted to stop; he was casting out demons in the name of Jesus. That unidentified man was doing good or trying to do good. He was making effort to follow the path Jesus had been establishing – doing good, avoiding evil, showing love through his actions and words. The unidentified man was not in opposition with Jesus. This made me consider something else. I couldn’t help but think about our non-Catholic Christian brethren and all other peoples who try to live in peace and love, who may not even know of Christ. Many of you have been members of a protestant church or have visited a protestant church. They do not practice their Christian beliefs in the same way as do we. But, are we not all trying to follow his path? Shouldn’t our hand and our love be extended to our Christian brethren?

As the church Christ established 2000 years ago, Catholics still practice in the ways He taught us and cling to the truths He gave us; we make effort to follow the patterns for faith, prayer, and behavior He directed. Our Protestant brethren do things a little differently; perhaps do not follow the rituals and precise ideology we follow. And yet, we know they are not our religious adversary. We are not against them. We are all God’s children. Only He can judge our fates. Jesus tells his followers to leave alone that unidentified man casting out demons. *I believe He’s telling us to leave good people alone.* Good people, those trying to follow the path, the behavior Christ established, are not against you, they are for you. One might question if it is better to do things the way Christ taught us. That’s a decision or choice for each of us to make.

Now, the situation with the Samaritans is a bit more complex, yet not alien in concept to us. The Samaritans are not opposed to Jesus. So why do they refuse to welcome Jesus into their city? Let us consider the Samaritans of 2000 years past. Although, you have to recall that in the parable about the “good Samaritan”, from the Jewish perspective, *good Samaritans* were considered as different or perhaps unique in this instance from the run of the mill Samaritans. In other words, the Jews of that day did not consider Samaritans as good folk in the general sense. And, we must also be aware that Samaritans in the same fashion, did not highly regard the Jews.

Sadly, this situation between people is not so different today is it? There are many nations that view other nations as opponents or even enemies. There are similar feelings of friction between groups of people within a nation, within a town, within a community. Consider political parties within our own country. Differences in political ideology has caused friction, divisiveness, anger among people at every level of our society. Is this an unusual situation? I suspect it has been much like this for 2000 years. War, opposition, rivalry, desire for control of others, desire for power, desire for material things – all aspects of egocentric behavior of individuals and groups that has existed for much more than 2000 years. Is this behavior a choice people make which distances them from Christ?

Let us take closer scrutiny of the Samaritans of that time in Christ's life. When we look a little closer at what the gospel tells us (and this is the complicated part) about the Samaritans refusing to receive Jesus, we assume they know of Jesus and would receive Him because He's known for doing such miraculous good things. He shows no preferences in socio-economic status, tribe, ethnicity; he only requires faith in God and God's teachings. He is widely known for healing the sick, feeding hungry, doing all sorts of miracles, teaching God's word, and feeding the spirit of those hungry for the truth. ***The fly in the ointment seems to be that Jesus intends to leave the Samaritans and proceed to Jerusalem. Leave them and go to the Jews!*** Leave the Samaritans and travel on to do good things for their political opposition!

I would argue that James and John are probably madder than your run of the mill angry guys. After all, they want to bring down fire from heaven to destroy those bad-bad Samaritans. What is Christ's reaction to the anger and violence suggested by James and John? Christ scolded them. Why? The Samaritan reaction to welcoming Christ, although it was a poor choice to refuse Jesus, was due to their hatred of the Jewish people in general (not Jesus per se), probably mainly due to actions and behavior of the leaders of the Jewish nation. Jesus, of course, understood all the political aspects and prejudice of his time. Christ knew the Samaritans were not his adversaries. Indeed, they were simply part of the rest of the world (gentiles and all the others) that Christ had come to save. He wants to save us regardless of our past sins and poor choices. The lesson regarding the Samaritans and the man casting out demons is simply about love. Simply about the possibility of entering into God's love through doing good, loving God above all else, avoiding evil. Perhaps Jesus was telling us that differences in opinions or perspectives does not necessarily make others your enemy. James and John required some rebuking to grasp the idea a little better. Though I have to say again, it seems the Samaritans made a poor choice. They let their prejudice come between them and Jesus. No doubt, Christ felt they could still be saved. They needed to make some good choices.

And what about the next three men who express desire to follow Jesus. Each shows something coming between them and following Jesus. The first who obviously cannot make the choice to leave his worldly things – his home, his place to lay his head. The second man who places his worldly family obligations between himself and Jesus. The third man who allows his connection to the past and the people he loves to come between himself and Christ. They all make the wrong choice. They let something come between them and Jesus in every instance.

Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta offered such good advice when she told us: "Let nothing come between you and Jesus." In other words, let nothing come between you and God's love. Brothers and sisters, I pray you will make the right choice. Nothing is more important. Peace be with you.