

Homily for the 26th Sunday of the Year

This last Sunday of September is the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, the theme of which is 'towards an ever wider we'. In his letter announcing this year's theme, Pope Francis emphasises that 'this focus calls on us to ensure that we will no longer think in terms of them and those, but only of us.'

Both the first reading and the gospel today remind us that it is not always easy to think of we rather than them and us. Medad and Eldad, hardly the best known characters in the Old Testament, were not with the 70 others to whom the gift of prophesy was given, and yet they began to prophesy, much to the annoyance of Joshua, Moses' number two who wanted Moses to stop them, something he refused to do. In the gospel it is the apostle John who reports to Jesus how he had tried to stop a person casting out devils in Jesus name because 'he was not one of us'. To this Jesus replied that such a person must not be stopped, saying 'Anyone who is not against us is for us.'

What Joshua and the apostle John were trying to do was limit God's action in the world. As a Church we have been guilty in the past of doing the same, building fences rather than bridges, famously claiming that outside the Church there is no salvation. Thankfully such a narrow minded and jaundiced view is no longer tenable. We do not have a monopoly on doing good, rather as Christians we look for Christ's presence in the world doing what he did during his life time. When someone forgives a wrong done, a neighbour sacrifices time and resources to help someone in need, medical personnel travel across the country to relieve a pandemic swamped hospital, a school collects food and clothing for the poor, though Jesus' name may not be spoken and the people concerned may not be Christian, still they are doing what he did, reaching out to raise up the fallen and rejected. 'Those who are not against us are for us.'

The second part of the gospel isn't to be taken literally, cutting off a hand or a foot, or plucking out an eye, rather Jesus is emphasising the importance of avoiding wrongdoing, especially giving bad example. St James gives us some examples in the 2nd reading, hoarding wealth, or perhaps in the current climate, vaccines; paying less to some than others for doing the same work, over indulgence in food and drink while others are starving. These sort of things work against an 'ever wider we', because they sustain the inequalities which exist in the world rather than trying to eradicate them.

Finally the psalm gives food for thought. If we think of the law as rules and regulations, it won't mean too much, but if the law is thought of as the will of God for human beings, then those who are shaped by the law will have the attributes of God, being wise, trustworthy, faithful, just and truthful, qualities which will help us to be an 'ever wider we'. I'll close by quoting Dr Pauli Murray a human rights activist. She writes, 'When my brothers draw a circle to exclude me, I shall draw a larger circle to include them. When they speak out for the privileges of the few, I shall shout out for the right of all humankind.' An example of working for 'an ever wider we'.

Bidding Prayers for the 26th Sunday of the Year

Celebrant:

By baptism we belong to Christ. May we always be conscious of the needs of others and do all that we can to meet those needs.

Reader:

For the Church – that the Church will be a sign of the presence of Christ in our world by reaching out to those in most need.

Lord in your mercy

For our political and civic leaders – that they will use their influence to bridge the growing gap between the rich and the poor, and do all they can to promote peace with justice.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have been ostracised either by their families, by society or by the Church – that they will be welcomed home.

Lord in your mercy

For all those in hospital and care homes and for those waiting for surgery – that they will receive the support and care they need at this time.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disasters and the Covid 19 pandemic, and Leonard Holt, Winifred Ash, James Lewis, Kenneth Balf, Sheila Hughes and Alan Clark whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

All loving God you lead all people to yourself though often by different ways. Inspire us to recognise the good works of all people. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen