

XXVI SUNDAY: Numbers 11:25-29; James 5:1-6; Mk 9:38-43, 45-48

Today's episode in the first reading is a very fit introduction to the lesson Jesus taught his apostles, which St. Mark narrates in today's Gospel.

Jesus wants everyone to be his followers and his helpers in the work of salvation. The Gospels present us Jesus as the second Moses, appointed by God to lead everyone to the promised land. He never ceases to appoint people as his helpers in his work of saving the world.

Not that he is not able to do the work all by himself; but he followed the plan his Father traced out, i.e. that everyone who is being saved, should in turn help those around him to be saved. And so, Jesus appointed first 12 apostles who would continue his work after he would go back to the Father. The apostles in turn, enlightened by the Spirit, appointed others to help them in the same mission.

And so, we have in the Church today:

- The Holy Father who guides the Church in the name of Jesus.
- Some four thousand Bishops who continue the work of the apostle.
- About 500,000 Priests who help the bishops in their work.
- Hundreds of thousands of catechists who help the Priests.

Are these the only people who God enlists in his service? No, God gives his Holy Spirit not only to Bishops and to Priests, but every baptized person. And the purpose of his giving the Spirit to everyone is precisely to enable each Christian to help Christ in the work of salvation.

On occasion, some behave as if the Spirit had been given only to them; they behave as if the Church exclusively belonged to them. And today's Gospel shows that they are wrong: The apostles wanted to reserve God's love and healing power to themselves as the sole owners and authorized distributors. We hear John complaining to Jesus that a stranger was driving out demons in Jesus' name though he was not of their company, Jesus gave them a reply similar to the one Moses had given to Joshua in the first reading: "You must not stop him.....anyone is not against us is for us." (Mk.9, 39)

It was like telling John: “John, what you have done is wrong; you should have rather rejoiced that even people not belonging to our group do the work we do; there is more than abundant work for everyone; we shall never be too many.”

I like you to put together two sayings of Jesus, the one found in today’s Gospel and the other taken from the Gospel of Matthew:

- “Anyone who is not against us is for us.” (Mk.9.40)
- “He who is not with me is against me.” (Mt.12, 30).

The two sayings of Jesus quoted above tell us that in the work of salvation no one can remain “neutral”; we all must choose, we all must decide.

Billy Graham has a fantastic way of summing up this gospel message by concluding his Crusades with a final challenge: "Decide! Cut away anything that prevents you from a radical decision for Jesus Christ! Decide for Christ!"

As we meditate on this beautiful Gospel today, let’s ask the Lord to help us to remain true to our ultimate goal in Christ – to be holy, to be good, and to serve His Church - the people of God.