

“The role of religious people is to lead people closer to Christ...”

**26th Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 27, 2009**

The Gospel today reminds us that the love of Jesus is far-reaching and very inclusive. When the disciples try to prevent a man from driving out demons in Jesus' name because he was not party of their group, Jesus tells them to let the man continue. Good is being accomplished through the man, and the disciples do not have a lock on goodness.

This is an important reading for Christians of all denominations to reflect upon and pray over. So often we are at odds and in competition with each other. So often we act as if our group, our Church, has a lock on the truth. Our tacit assumptions that Christ or the Holy Spirit works exclusively through us create scandal and drive many away from any participation in organized religion. Our criticism or dismissal of other Christian faiths is arrogant and presumptuous, as if we had exclusive control of the power of Jesus.

Jesus reminds the disciples and us that leading people astray in such a way will have dire consequences. The role of religious people is to lead people closer to Christ, and strengthen their belief, not to disillusion them and drive them away. Any act of kindness, no matter how small, done in Christ's name or to one of His followers will not go unnoticed or unrewarded. But any act of scandal or leading others into sin will have severe consequences and punishment.

In very graphic language, adapting the words of Isaiah the prophet about what would happen to the religious leaders of Israel for leading the people of God astray by their own sinfulness, Jesus cautions the disciples.

In this passage Jesus is preparing the disciples to be the new religious leaders of God's people and warning them they must be different than their predecessors. Not only are they to avoid sin and scandal, they are to make whatever sacrifice is necessary to do so. Nothing they might suffer on earth could ever compare to the eternal torment they will experience if their failures drive others into sin and away from the Lord.

It is a caution that all who would be disciples must take to heart. May Christ help us all to be more faithful.

God bless you.

Fr. Pat