

# Sunday Homily

## 26th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

26 SEPTEMBER 2021

YEAR B

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK II

"No one who works a miracle in my name  
is likely to speak evil of me."

### Illustration

Where can we find good role models in our modern world? Whose words do we admire for their wisdom and hope? Whose actions impress us with their compassion?

These questions were asked of a group of young Catholics attending a retreat. Their replies surprised their teachers, who had been expecting them to focus on Catholic role models. Mother Teresa's name was mentioned and her inspirational work in India caring for poor people in the Calcutta slums; also Pope John Paul II, who had faith that young people could play a positive role in Church and society. But many of the names were people who were not Catholic, indeed not even Christian.

For example, they talked of Martin Luther King, the African American Baptist leader prominent in the American civil rights movement. In 1964 he became the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for his commitment to end racial segregation without using violence. They mentioned Mahatma Gandhi, an Indian Hindu who believed in political change through non-violence; and the Dalai Lama, a Buddhist spiritual leader who promotes peace internationally. Pop stars and actors who support justice campaigns on cancelling international debt, fair trade and climate change also struck a chord with the young people.

Is it a matter of concern that young people look up to figures who, in Catholic terms, are not one of us, some of whom may even have little time for organised religion?

### Gospel Teaching

In today's Gospel one phrase is repeated twice: "not one of us". The apostle John is indignant that a man outside of their circle is casting out devils. "Because he was not one of us we tried to stop him," John tells Jesus. But Jesus stuns the disciples by telling them that they have no monopoly on the healing power of Jesus. "Anyone who is not against us is for us," he says. Shortly before this incident, the apostles themselves had been unsuccessful in trying to exorcise an unclean spirit from a young man. Now they were upset to see someone outside their circle being more successful.

From John's words, it appears that the apostles are trying to restrict Jesus' influence to their own small circle. They feel that the healing work of Jesus should be confined to them. They want something others don't have – perhaps to be honoured for it and to exercise power over others. Jesus makes clear that he does not support restricting God's power for good. Wherever evil is eradicated, the work has God's blessing.

This same message is given by Moses in today's Old Testament reading. Joshua contends that the Lord's spirit of prophecy can only enter those individuals who were "in the gathering" when that spirit was bestowed. Moses teaches that prophetic ministry can be exercised by anyone.

### Application

The mission of healing and saving humanity and the world is not the sole responsibility of the disciples, or, in today's world, of clergy, or of Catholics. It is a mission that is entrusted to everyone. Jesus does not want to close the circle around him. As long as healing and reconciliation are taking place, Jesus does not draw boundaries. His followers are called to cooperate with all those in the world who are promoting human dignity, assisting those who are vulnerable and taking responsibility for building a more just world.

This is why Christian agencies have worked with Muslim relief agencies in Pakistan to bring humanitarian aid to earthquake victims; why Pope John Paul II met with pop stars Bob Geldof and Bono in 1999 to support the campaign for the debts of poor countries to be cancelled; why Christian campaigners against nuclear weapons rub shoulders with secular anti-nuclear organisations. In many local areas, churches link with secular bodies and other faiths in soup runs and schemes for befriending vulnerable people.

Jesus asks a lot of us here. Be easy on others, give them the benefit of the doubt, assume that God is working in them. Do not seek the prestige of wealth, possessions and power for yourself, and refuse to exploit others. Instead, demand simplicity, honesty and repentance as you push towards spiritual growth. God's Spirit is within our family and neighbours, and perhaps we can learn to recognise the prophets among us and listen to them.

Perhaps too we can begin to recognise the prophet deep inside our own selves that cautions us to be kind and gracious, not to support the waging of war and not to hurt or diminish the least among us.