

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY
Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, September 26, 2021

Some years back my youth ministers came to me wanting to do a mission trip, so I called Mark, a Catholic missionary. He has been on many missionary trips to different countries. This experience has given him much wisdom when it comes to serving the Lord. Mark helped us to join up with Southern Exposure to build homes for the poor in Juarez, Mexico, just across the border from El Paso, Texas. The homes were a simple, concrete block structure, with a roof, two doors and windows. Not much by our standards, but to these families, many who were living in cardboard structures, this was a tremendous blessing.

Mark came and gave us instructions and a plan. He prayed with us, read scripture, let us know how hard the days would be, and gave stern warnings not to deviate from the missionary plan. Mostly these were common sense guidelines to follow, like stay with the group, never go out on your own and what to wear on the trip, at the home base, and at the work site, and the one free afternoon when we got to see other parts of Juarez. Any inappropriate clothing, misbehaving, or going off on your own and you would be sent home immediately at your expense. No exceptions. Everyone had to agree with these terms.

As we were loading onto the bus to travel to El Paso, one of our young ladies thought it would be alright to dress very casually and immodestly for this portion of the trip. Mark would not let her on the bus. He gave her 30 minutes to go home and change or not go on the trip. She got upset, but he reminded her of the rules. Mark turned to me and said, "When you do the work of the Lord, you can't give Satan any doorway to destroy you or to interfere in the Lord's work. This is a missionary trip for the Lord, all focus on the Lord and the mission, not ourselves." She did go home, changed, was allowed onto the bus, and we went on to have a blessed trip. The highlight was to see the faces of the family that would be moving into the house. Once I placed the keys into the father's hands, hugs and tears were all around.

We are all called to be missionaries. At times we may not feel like missionaries, but by our baptism this is who we are. Our mission is Jesus' mission. In a way Jesus has a bus ready to pick us up for missionary work. Are we ready, dressed appropriately, free to serve and focused on the mission? If we can't get on the bus, then we have some things to get in order in our life. If we are not missionary ready, then how can we do the Lord's work? If we are not missionary ready, then are we ready for heaven and eternal life?

In the Gospel of Mark, recall that last week we heard Jesus chastise his disciples for their argument about who among them was the greatest. Jesus gets a small child and says whoever receives one of these receives me and the one who sent me. The disciples misunderstand Jesus' mission with their attitude about who was the greatest.

They were not ready to follow Jesus in his mission. Again today, the disciples still do not understand. We hear this from John's question about wanting to chastise ones doing ministry that was not one them, the disciples. Very similar to the question, Joshua is complaining to Moses about.

In the First Reading, we hear of Joshua complaining to Moses that two men outside of us that is not of our company had received a portion of the spirit given to the community. "My lord Moses, stop them!" Joshua asked. "No!" Moses answered, "We ought to rejoice rather than complain". Moses says that all the people of the Lord were prophets. Would that they might bestow his spirit on them all?

Would that all my people would be prophets? Why would John be upset or bothered by someone not of their company ministering to people. Is it jealousy, envy, or pride that he questions their ministry? John's question is further evidence that the disciples have not yet grasped Jesus' words to them. They continue to judge by worldly standards and not God's.

The Greek word used here for sin also connotes "stumbling" or "causing scandal." Jesus teaches His disciples the consequences to those who would put obstacles before His people, especially His least one. It would be better to have a millstone around ones neck, and thrown into the sea. Better for this to happen than to be thrown into Gehenna, in reference to hell.

Jesus challenges us, if we are going to be His followers, and carry on in his Mission of the Kingdom, we have to be free ourselves. Not letting our own egos, our pride, our jealousy, envy, get in the way of the Mission of Jesus. The only way we can prevent this is to be free, and be ready to get on the Mission Bus. No me, myself, and I on the Mission Bus of Jesus.

Jesus makes it very clear what this means, and how serious it is to cooperate with Him. This is why the words spoken about the hand, foot, and eye should get our attention. Certainly poking out our eyes and cutting off our hands seems extreme, but I think this is Jesus' point.

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire. If it is your foot, cut it off. If it is your eye, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

Jesus is not asking for self-mutilation. Instead He is talking about the serious nature of sin and its consequences. Gehenna is the Valley of Hinnon, outside of Jerusalem, where child sacrifices were once practiced, which became the location of something like a garbage dump, a terrible place to be. It is a name for Hell. A place to avoid at all cost. This is the way we need to treat sin, avoid it at all cost especially since sin is not worth the risk of losing out on God's Kingdom. So are we ready to follow Jesus; what do we need to do to get ready ourselves to be Jesus' missionary?

The message today is about being totally committed and dedicated to God. St. Francis de Sales wrote a book called *Introduction to the Devout Life*. In his words, he tells us how to always be ready. Cultivate a life of holy love. We have to be about ridding our lives of our attachments, exaggeration of our self-importance, all inordinate self-centeredness. It's a constant battle and struggle as long as we are here on earth. Nurture holy love, seek only God's glory in all things. Holy love begins to grow in us as we begin to let go of all that does not lead us to God's goodness. Follow St. Francis de Sales advice and we will be ready, on the Bus, to enter into Eternal life.