

"For whoever is not against us is for us."



This Sunday, the disciples thought that healing in the Lord's name is reserved exclusively for them. Thus, they attempted to stop a "stranger" from casting out demons in Jesus' name. Our Discussion Questions will guide your Sunday Bible Study with family, friends and church groups.

"Whoever is not against us is for us."

Christ's principle that "whoever is not against us is for us" is clearly stated in these Readings. It shows His open-mindedness and all-embracing attitude towards people. Fr. Omer Prieto says this is Jesus' vision of God's Kingdom, where all people of goodwill are invited to participate, because God is the Father of all.

But God is surely free to work outside of our familiar religious structures also. What it means, explains Fr. Demetrius R. Dumm, O.S.B., is that we should work in genuine humility to make our own religious structures as open as possible to the saving power of God. So what should our relationship be with authentic Christians who are not Catholic? We treat our non-Catholic brothers and sisters with deep respect because, as Fr. Joseph Pellegrino says, we recognize that God can and does speak through them as He can and does speak through us.

The Church is the Body of Christ and the other Christian denominations are an authentic part of the Church. Fr. Alex McAllister SDS tells us that the way ahead to a fuller unity is through friendship and dialogue. But while he says it is perfectly correct for us to join non-Catholics in prayer and in support, it is incorrect for us to reject our Catholicism. If we have been admitted to the Eucharist, and we have, we cannot reject the Gift of the Eucharist.

"Whoever causes one of these little ones to sin . . ."

Fr. Ron Rolheiser reminds us that our children are not ours, they are God's children. In the end, we are only their guardians, all of us. God is the real parent and God's love, care, and anxiety for them will always be in excess of our own.

Moreover, the "little ones" that the Lord was referring to here were the poor common folk, unsophisticated and often marginalized, who took great comfort in the message of the Lord and the hope it offered them. They were the "outsiders" during his time when Jewish culture was influenced largely by the rich and the powerful. Jesus Christ is declaring that humility, such as found in a very small child is a requisite for greatness.

Truly God's blessing is upon the meek, Fr. Orly Sapuay, MS explains. But just how can we strike a balance between being humble and meek, and assertive enough to succeed in the world today? In living just and upright lives, we can do a good job as a humble leader. But, Fr. Thomas Rosica, CSB adds, that is different from being able to succeed and being placed in greater positions of responsibility.

"A great millstone were put around his neck..."

Cutting off hands and feet and plucking out eyes are basically self-mutilation. They are repugnant to believers. The point is not to take these sayings literally. John Bergsma points out that even the saints have not made a practice of self-amputation. It is because as our Lord's teaching from earlier in Mark says, the cause of sin is not in our physical appendages.

Fr. Rich Lifrak, SS.CC says Jesus' words, to be sure, were sharper, but perhaps that was simply a means to reach listeners who were stubborn and hardhearted. But, they certainly grab our attention. And, in doing so, they demonstrate how seriously Jesus took the issue of sin. Specifically with the sin of scandal - causing others to sin. It is, Fr. Jim Kirstein, SMA points out, a grim warning against those who would lead astray any of the "little ones" who believe in our

Lord. It is a discourse about the reality of Hell. And that, Fr. Phil Bloom admits, is a topic that most preachers would gladly avoid. Still, we cannot faithfully represent Jesus and not speak about Hell because He spoke about it often.

The Spirit of God chooses to dwell in our interior depths. Fr. John Foley, S. J. says this is because within the deep interior is a place in us that is made in God's image. Jesus invites us to come to Him. But the one thing He will not do is to take away our freedom. That would destroy our essence. God does not want to fill heaven with robots. He desires souls.