

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B
September 27, 2009

Readings: Numbers 11:25-29; James 5:1-6; Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

Whoever Is Not Against Us Is for Us

“For whoever is not against us is for us.” These are words Jesus gives us in this morning’s gospel passage. We must get past the notion that nothing is good unless we do it ourselves, either individually or as a group or organization. We need to focus on getting the job done and not at looking for lines of demarcation that separate our official duties and responsibilities. We should look how we can work together concentrating on our common interests, and not on our differences.

We see this in our communities, in our families, at work, but most commonly we think about Christ’s words when we think of religious activities. *“For whoever is not against us is for us.”* And from a religious perspective, we can look at this saying of Christ on three different levels. We can look at our relations with non-Christian religions; we call this interreligious relations. We can look at our relations with non-Catholic, Christian denominations; we call this ecumenical relations. And lastly, we can look at our own relations with our fellow Catholics.

When we talk about interreligious relations, we most commonly refer to dealing with Jews and Muslims because we share with them a belief that there is one God. We have different understandings of God’s nature but we also share a great deal about how God expects us to act, about what is moral and immoral. The Church has maintained strong ties with Jews; Judaism is the foundation of Christianity. And she has recently strengthened efforts to improve relations with Muslims as well. But many get concerned and wonder how this can work because they see the actions of radical Muslim groups, and they see that they do not seem to conform with our Christian beliefs. But Muslim morality has much in common with Christianity morality, for example in the areas of contraception, abortion, and homosexuality. When the Vatican goes to the United Nations to argue against issues such as population control, she is much more likely to find herself aligned with Islamic countries, and not with the so-called Christian nations of Europe or our own current US administration.

Those who believe in God have a common enemy, and that is Satan. Whoever is not against us in the effort to defeat Satan is for us. Muslims have a very strong morality and, while this morality is often enforced in ways that are distorted and extreme, they hold strictly to what they believe; often more so, as a group, than do Christians. Muslims are having large families while Christians, including Catholics who are not supposed to practice contraception, are no longer sustaining their populations in most parts of the world. Europe will soon become an Islamic continent. Muslims, members of the Islam religion, by being obedient to God’s command to be fruitful and multiply, will grow in number relative to Christians, not by conversion, but by procreation. For Christians, having large families may be the best way for us to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. But our “world leaders,” the secular humanists at the UN, tell us that we must accept contraception and limit family size because it is good for the environment and will stop global warming. We can stand with the Muslims and reject the demands of those who do

not believe in God. If they are not against us, they are for us in this fight.

On the next level of relations we can talk about our dealings with our fellow Christians. For the first thousand years after Christ walked this earth, there was only one Christian Church, but then came the break between Rome in the West and Constantinople in the East and the Orthodox Church was formed. And then in the 16th century, we had Martin Luther and the Protestant revolution which has led to literally thousands of Christian denominations. Both of these breaks, these tears in the fabric of the Church, were the result of egos and miscommunications and misunderstandings. They were the work of Satan trying to tear Christ's Church apart. But again there has been much ecumenical dialogue to heal the wounds and bring unity back to the Christian world. Much is the result of the Holy Spirit working through the Second Vatican Council. There has been a joint statement with Baptists about interpreting the Bible. There was a joint declaration with Lutherans that cleared up much of the semantic confusion on the subject of justification; the roles of faith and of works. The differences were never as great as imagined. Next month we will celebrate the tenth anniversary of this historic declaration. We all need to pray hard to heal the divisions and bring all Christians back into one Church. But, in the meantime, we must work together to spread the gospel. We must acknowledge the good works done by those who belong to other denominations, and not deny them because they weren't performed by a Catholic. We must recognize that through our shared baptisms we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

And one of the most visible areas for this cooperation is among the pro-life community; people of all denominations working together to preach the gospel of life. But even here I often see how Satan can try to work to divide and cause differences between the various pro-life groups. Pro-lifers need to be particularly vigilant so that egos and competition do not lead to destructive criticism of others who are fighting the same battle.

And on the last level, we need to talk about how we work together as Catholics. We must all be willing to do our part and accept our responsibilities. Through our baptisms we receive a share in the priestly, kingly, and prophetic mission of the Church. We cannot sit back and hide behind the hierarchy of the Church and say that is Father's job, or that is the deacon's job. If God calls you and gives you gifts to perform a certain ministry, go for it and do it faithfully. We are a small parish. We do not have a large staff with people paid to run departments. We do not have large commissions and committees. It is up to each and every one of us to make this parish, not only run smoothly, but to grow. We cannot sit and wait for others and claim that it is not our job. I ask you to pray and look around and see what activities would make this parish and our community more spiritually vibrant. And then be willing to take action. What are your skills and talents, and how can you use them to make this a more lively parish so that it will attract others to come here to worship? Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone. Do not be afraid of stepping on someone else's toes. Do not be like the waitress who turns her back on customers claiming it is not her table. There is plenty of work for everyone; the harvest is great, but the laborers are few.

Deacon Joe Hulway