

HOMILY ~ 26th SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME SEPTEMBER 25/26, 2021

A few years ago there was a Mensa convention in San Francisco. Mensa is an organization whose members have an IQ of 140 or higher. Several of the members were having lunch at a local café. During lunch they discovered that the pepper shaker had salt in it, and the salt shaker had pepper in it. They decided that they wanted to swap the contents of the two bottles without spilling any of the contents using only what was on the table. They came up with an ingenious plan using a napkin, a straw and an empty saucer. They called over the waitress thinking they could dazzle her with their plan. When she came to the table they said: "We noticed that the pepper shaker contains salt and the salt shaker contains pepper." The waitress responded: "Sorry about that." She unscrewed the caps of both bottles and switched the caps. Then she said: "Will that be one check or separate checks?" People with high IQs probably share certain things in common. In a lot of ways, they are like minded. When we have groups of like-minded people, we feel more comfortable in the group; but the perspective of the group is limited. The high IQ people needed the waitress to step in and give them the obvious solution to the problem.

In the First Reading today, Moses was overburdened by all of the responsibilities he had for the Israelite people. The Lord told him to pick 70 elders that he wanted to help him and the Spirit would rest upon them. Moses made a list, and two of the people, Eldad and Medad did not attend the meeting. They were prophesying in the camp, and Joshua told Moses to stop them because they did not attend the meeting. He did not have a problem with what they were doing, and their names were on the list. The only issue he had with them is that they did not attend the meeting. We cannot limit the Spirit in this way. The Spirit works in ways that we are not aware and in ways that we do not understand. Sometimes the Church can get a little exclusive. To be part of the Catholic Church, you have to follow all of the rules, never question anything that the Catholic Church teaches and behave in a certain way. Sometimes we need people that question things. That is how we progress as a Church. That is how we make things better. The Church is not an exclusive club. The Holy Spirit can work through everyone, not just certain people that we designate or recognize. We cannot limit the work of the Holy Spirit in this way.

There is a similar issue in the Gospel Reading today. Someone is driving out demons, and John wants Jesus to stop them because they are not part of the group. They are driving out demons. This seems to be a very good thing. Does it matter that he is not part of the group? Jesus responds: "Whoever is not against us is for us." Jesus wants to include as many people as possible. When we formed our Parish Pastoral Council, I wanted to get people with different perspectives. That is how we make good decisions for our Parish. I think that is one of the problems with our political system today. People get so locked into a political party with like-minded people, and they cannot see the great things that are being proposed by another party. We can be closed to the goodness that comes from other religions, other countries, other races, other nationalities. Everyone has the potential to offer something really valuable. We should not discount anyone. The Holy Spirit can work through everyone. If we limit our groups to like-minded people, we may never figure out how to change the caps on the salt and pepper shakers.

In our culture, there is sometimes so much of an emphasis on individual rights that we become blind to our obligations to others. I think the isolation of COVID over the last 1 ½ years contributed to this problem. We are all in this together, and what I do has a profound effect upon others. Jesus tells us that if we cause someone to sin it would be better to drown in the sea. The surest way we affect others is by what we do, good or evil. People are more likely to copy what they see. The more divisive we become, the more acceptable divisiveness is. If we are going to survive and flourish as a Church, as a nation, as a world, we need to start breaking down the walls that divide us. Whoever is not against us is for us, regardless of what group they belong to.

Love & Peace,
Fr. Jim