

“Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets!”

The first reading (Numbers 11:25-29) and the Gospel (Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48) warn us against the erroneous attitudes of exclusivism and monopoly in the apostolate. In the first reading from Numbers (11:25-29), we see the Spirit of God empowering individuals to prophesy. Eldad and Medad who were not at the gathering with the other elders also received the spirit and prophesied in the camp. When Joshua expressed concern about Eldad and Medad prophesying in the camp, Moses responded with a profound statement: “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets!” In the Gospel, the apostles were concerned about someone outside their group driving out demons in Jesus’ name. Jesus told them not to stop the person because anyone doing good in His name is on their side.

Both readings emphasize the inclusivity of God’s mission. We are reminded that God’s gifts and blessings are not exclusive to his “known” followers; God can work good and even miraculous things through his “anonymous” followers. The work of God can be done by anyone who acts in faith, regardless of their affiliation with us. This challenges our tendencies towards pride and jealousy, urging us to embrace a spirit of collaboration and openness. It teaches us to avoid competition within our faith community. Instead, we should support each other in doing God’s work. Focusing on teamwork and unity strengthens our mission to follow Jesus and spread His love.

What about those who either do not accept (those of other religions) or accept some but not all (other Christians) of the teachings of the Catholic Church? Can God work wonders through them? Can they even be saved? Jesus responds to this in the Gospel: “For Whoever is not against us is for us” (Mark 9:40). So, the answer is yes. Vatican II is very clear on this. The Catholic Church recognizes her link with other ecclesial communities especially through the Sacred Scriptures, baptism, and the Holy Spirit. And for other non-Christian religions (Nostra aetate, 2), the Church sees whatever good, or truth found amongst them as a preparation for the Gospel (Lumen Gentium nos. 15-16). Jesus says, “Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward” (Mark 9:41).

Nevertheless, the Catholic Church is opposed to any form of “religious relativism.” That is, the notion that one religion is equally as good as the other. She is unequivocal in her assertion that the Church founded by Jesus Christ “subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him” (Lumen Gentium, 8). And that Jesus continues to touch lives today through her. Despite this, she recognizes that Jesus works miracles through those who have not yet accepted him or been fully incorporated into the Catholic Church. Are we willing to celebrate the good works of others, even if they do not align perfectly with our own beliefs or practices? Fr. Bula