

Homily – 26th Sunday of the Year B

Our Gospel passage today ([Mk 9:38-43, 45, 47-48](#)) is one of those passages of Scripture that people find difficult to understand: "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us." Some Christians cite this passage to justify the division of the Church or why they have founded their own private churches. Please, let us honestly seek the truth. As I always point out, we're not saying anyone is going to hell. We are simply discerning the truth of God's word and we have an obligation from Jesus to do so. Jesus says, "The truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32).

We see Jesus correcting the apostles today; they had thought they only could pray and cast our demons. Christ's intention is clear from the Gospel of Mark, "Afterward he appeared to the **eleven** [the apostles (the first Bishops of the Church) without Judas Iscariot] ... And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved... And these signs will accompany **those who believe** [(their followers) the generality of Christians, priests, deacons, religious and laity alike]: in my name they will cast out demons...." (Mark 16:14-18). Accordingly, while Jesus put the apostles (and their successors) alone in charge of evangelization of the world, in charge of the One Universal Church of Christ; he empowered any Christian (their followers) to pray, do miracles and cast out demons. In his words, "Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me." Note, performing miracles is different from claiming that one could legitimately found a private church.

This is the teaching of the Catholic Church. We can "google" the documents on the internet and read the following: "**Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only**.... division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature" (Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1). Also, "the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery, **are not Churches in the proper sense**" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Declaration, "*Dominus Iesus*, 17). Beloved, anyone who reads and studies the Bible correctly will find this teaching of the Church irrevocable.

Now here comes the tricky part: though they are not proper churches, Vatican II teaches that we can call them Christians: "The Church recognizes that in many ways she is

linked with those who, being baptized, are honored with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter..." (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 15). There is no contradiction here. They are Christians in virtue of being baptized but certainly not churches since they cannot found churches. Only God can found the Church. And God already did; and he chose Peter in order to do so (not anyone else): "You are Peter, and on this rock I [God/Jesus] will build my church" (Matt 16:18).

Have you ever asked yourself, "Which Church did Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the apostles attend?" Certainly, they attended the first one; and that's the Catholic Church that began in Jerusalem, under the Roman Empire. That is the one we see Christ speak about in the Bible, "You are Peter, and on this rock I [God/Jesus] will build my church" (Matt 16:18). Is there in any Bible passage that says, "You are Thomas ... I will build my church?" Or "You are James or Luther or Calvin... I will build my church?" That is what the Catholic Church is pointing out.

What is our own concern with the issue? Are we trying to run "other churches" down or to criticize them? Not at all! That is a complete misunderstanding of the teachings of Christ and his Church. Just look at Moses' attitude toward God's giving of the spirit to the seventy elders in the First Reading concerning the two men, Eldad and Medad who "prophesied in the camp." Joshua told Moses, "Moses, my lord, stop them." But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the people of the LORD were prophets! Would that the LORD might bestow his spirit on them all!" God fulfilled this wish in the New Testament dispensation. He anointed us all with his Spirit at our Baptism and Confirmation. We share in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry. However, the Holy Spirit given to the seventy elders helped them to work with Moses, not to divide God's people, Israel. The Holy Spirit we have received is to help us be united as one Church.

Finally, Christ willed that "there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16). Just as we have an authentic "leadership succession" in the Old Testament flock of Israel (Exod 3:6-10; Josh 3:7; 2Sam 2:4; 1Kgs 2:1-4; Ezek 37:22), so also we have a legitimate "apostolic succession" in the one flock of the New Testament from St Peter to Pope Benedict XVI. We pray that God will give all the grace to be faithful to his irrevocable will for his Church – one Lord, one Faith, and one Baptism (cf. Eph 4:5). Amen.