

Fr. Rudy's Reflections
The Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 29, 2024

Lessons on Tolerance

My Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

Imagine a modern-day workplace where a small team is developing an innovative project. The group has its methods, routines, and a sense of pride in their work. Suddenly, they learn of an outsider—someone not part of their team—who is making similar progress on the same project. Instead of rejoicing that their goal is closer to being realized, they feel threatened, defensive, and even dismissive of the outsider's efforts. Their frustration stems from the idea that someone not following their rules or methods could achieve the same success.

This scenario is reminiscent of an event in the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus's disciples express concern over a man performing miracles in Jesus's name, even though he is not one of their group. They are uneasy, perhaps even jealous, that someone outside their circle is capable of such work. But Jesus, in his wisdom, responds with a profound lesson on tolerance: "Anyone who is not against us is for us."

This theme of tolerance is echoed throughout all three readings today, from the Book of Numbers, the letter of James, and Mark's Gospel. The common thread is the call to openness and the recognition that God's grace and goodness are not confined to one group, one method, or one path.

Religious exclusion is a dangerous road that can lead to intolerance, judgment, and even violence. We see this throughout history and, sadly, even in our world today. It is easy for any group—whether religious, social, or professional—to become elitist, to believe that their way is the only way. Yet, as Jesus teaches, God's grace can flow through many channels, often in ways that surprise us.

There is great value in the order, structure, and sacraments of the Catholic faith. The Mass and the Eucharist are profound, guaranteed encounters with Christ. But we must also acknowledge that God is not limited by our understanding. His grace is active in all corners of the world, often in unexpected places and through unexpected people. Consider the wisdom of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, who would become Pope John XXIII. On the eve of the conclave that would elect him pope, he remarked, "We are not here to guard a museum, but to cultivate a flourishing garden of life." This sentiment beautifully captures the essence of today's readings. We are not called to protect our faith as if it were a relic of the past but to nurture it, allowing it to grow and blossom in ways we might not anticipate.

In a world where divisions often seem to define us, let us take Jesus's words to heart. Let us be open to the ways God is working through others, even those who are different from us. Where there is love, goodness, and truth, there is God. Let us celebrate this, recognizing that God's grace knows no bounds and is at work in all people of goodwill.

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Rudy