

[Deut. 4:1-2, 6-8; Ps. 15; James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23]

Throughout the Gospels, we hear regularly about the Pharisees. A Pharisee, in the popular imagination, chooses the Law over mercy. They are the hypocritical men, challenging Jesus' authority around every corner. The Pharisee becomes something like a stock character. He's the bad guy. We know it.

While there are grounds for a historical conflict between the Pharisees and early Christians, we shouldn't be too quick to dismiss them as an "enemy." Because such a dismissal, ironically, was precisely the problem with the Pharisees in the first place. We tend to be suspicious of the law. As American Christians, reared in a certain evangelical culture, we want to highlight the power of grace over the perils of the law.

Israel did not understand the Law as a burden imposed from God. The Law was full of grace. We hear in Deuteronomy: "Now therefore, Israel, hear the statutes and ordinances I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you" (Dt 4:1).

Notice that the Law is a source of abundant life. The psalmist compares the one who follows the Law to the tree planted alongside a river, who "yields its fruit in season; its leaves never wither; whatever he does prospers" (Ps 1:3).

To know the Law is to encounter God's very wisdom, to become capable of incarnating this wisdom into a way of life. Who wouldn't want everyone to have the gift of the Law, of divine grace? But like all law, even Israel's could be used as a way of exclusion. The Pharisees keep the Law, but are aghast that Jesus gathers around him disciples who eat a meal with unclean hands. The Law, rather than a source of grace, has become a measure of who's in and who's out.

Jesus' disciples are out.

Jesus challenges both the Pharisees as well as us. Our Lord preaches that defilement is not a matter of simply cleaning one's hands. Rather, defilement is an impure heart.

Jesus does not abrogate the Law. He doesn't say, "I let my disciples do

whatever they want. After all, mercy.” No! He gets to the heart of the Law: holiness, to become that fruitful tree planted alongside a river.

Early Christians, through the influence of St. Paul, allowed baptism of Gentiles who didn't follow the Law. But, they also didn't dismiss it due to mercy.

We hear in James that we are to practice a religion that is pure and undefiled: to be doers of the Word and not just hearers. The Law for Christians becomes the self-emptying love of Jesus Christ manifested on the cross.

Thus, for us Christians, there is something to do. To follow Jesus Christ. This means that whatever person we have determined to be, a contemporary “Pharisee” is not our enemy. Because we don't have enemies! We only meet men and women who are potential friends, fellow worshippers of God.

The Gospel this week isn't about discovering our own righteousness, unlike those evil, hypocritical Pharisees. The Gospel is about conforming ourselves to the measure of all love, Jesus Christ.

So Jesus isn't saying, “Jewish law bad, My law better.” Jesus doesn't seek to control external behaviors. His Law is constructed around the heart, the seat of human will and character. Keeping the hands pure while the heart is crusty won't purify the whole person, Jesus says. But if you concentrate on the heart -- the will in the driver's seat of all human behavior -- then the whole person will be pure.

In what ways are you a doer of the word? In what ways a hearer only? What keeps you from doing God's word? Consider the ways you know you are serving God well. These are signs of God's devotion to you. What other signs do you see daily?

What would happen if we focused on purifying our hearts? We'd have to give up judgmentalism, gossip, envy, and bias. We'd have to discipline our thoughts and stop entertaining delicious resentments and nursing old injuries. Purity of heart demands vigilance, daily and hourly practice, and a lot of space for self-forgiveness. The sooner we begin, the sooner we'll get there. AMEN!

[Readings: 1 Cor 2:1-5; Ps. 119; Luke 4:16-30]

Pope Saint Gregory I, also known as the Great, was the Pope of the Catholic Church between 590 and 604 AD.

Gregory was born around 540 in Rome. The exact date of his birth is unknown. Although the Western Roman Empire had collapsed long before his birth, many ancient Roman families still commanded great wealth and influence in the city. Gregory was born into one such family. His great-great-grandfather was Pope Felix III who reigned from 483 to 492. (Astute readers may suspect this to be a scandal, but this was at a time before the clergy took vows of celibacy.) Gregory's family was very wealthy and owned estates on the island of Sicily which provided income.

Gregory was well educated and excelled in all his studies. He also became an expert in law. He excelled so much he became the Prefect of Rome, just as his father had been. Gregory was only 33 years old.

After Gregory's father had died, Gregory had the family villa in Rome converted into a monastery. As a monk, Gregory was hard and strict. When a monk on his deathbed confessed to stealing three pieces of gold, Gregory ordered he be left to die alone. After the poor monk had died, Gregory ordered his body thrown on a dung heap along with the three coins. Then, in a turn of heart, Gregory offered 30 Masses for the deceased monk.

Pope Pelagius II, who reigned from 579 to 590, chose Gregory to serve as an ambassador to the imperial court in Constantinople.

In 590, Pope Pelagius II died, and Gregory was proclaimed pope by acclamation. This was not something Gregory wanted, but he accepted the burden nevertheless. Pope Gregory was famous for the emphasis he put on missionary work. He sent many people out to bring many to Jesus and into the Church. Anglo-Saxon Britain was, at that time, still on the frontier of Christendom. It was Pope Gregory who dispatched St. Augustine (of Canterbury) to Kent in 597 (not to be confused with St. Augustine of Hippo).

Pope Gregory made many changes to the Mass, some of which remain today. The position of the Our Father in the Mass remains where Pope Gregory placed it. He emphasized the aspect of service to the poor for deacons. The number of deacons was increasing in number and they were seen as less essential as extensions of the Bishop than they were in the early Church. Deacons were often tasked with giving alms to the poor, and at least one was assigned to each church and ordained for this purpose.

Pope Gregory may have also established "cantus planus," known in English as plainchant. Most today know this style of singing as Gregorian Chant. The melodious, monophonic music is known throughout the Church and closely associated with medieval monasteries. Gregorian chant gives us the oldest music we still have in the original form, some dating to the centuries just after the death of Gregory. It remains a matter of some dispute just how involved Pope Gregory was in the development of the style. Some music historians argue the credit is a misattribution that rightly belongs to his less famous successor of a century later, Gregory II.

Pope Gregory was well known for his alms to the poor, and he gave quite generously of the riches donated to the Church by the wealthy people of Rome. Everything from money to land was given to the poor in some fashion. He made clear to his subordinates that their duty was to relieve the distress faced by the poor. He ordered his clergy to go out into the streets to find and care for the poor in person. Any clergy who were unwilling to go into the streets and help the poor were replaced. Assets of the Church were liquidated to provide income for alms.

Pope Gregory himself refused to eat until his monks returned from their work of handing out food. He also made certain to dine with a dozen poor people at each meal. Gregory is widely considered to be the first medieval pope, and he was a prolific writer. Pope Gregory suffered from arthritis in his last years. He died on March 12, 604 AD. He was immediately proclaimed a saint by means of popular acclaim. Saint Gregory's relics remain in St. Peter's Basilica to this day.

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September 3, 2018

The plight of our brothers and sisters who work hard but struggle to make ends meet calls us all to reflect in a special way this Labor Day. Today, we read in St. Luke's Gospel how Jesus, upon returning home to Nazareth, read from the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue declaring, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor."<sup>1</sup> Sadly, in our times too many people are excluded, marginalized, and politically and economically disenfranchised. The struggle of working people, of the poor, as Pope Francis reminds us, is not first a "social or political question. No! It is the Gospel, pure and simple."<sup>2</sup> There has been some notable progress in our economy in recent years, but it is also apparent that it is not where it should be for many, and we can all play a productive role in making sure it is a system that upholds the dignity of all people.

Recent economic news and data report that poverty continues to decline, unemployment is down to one of the lowest levels in decades and there has been economic growth with production, stocks and profits rising to record levels. But is this the whole story? Do these developments give an entirely accurate account of the daily lives and struggles of working people, those who are still without work, or the underemployed struggling with low wages?

It is encouraging that poverty has gone down, but still almost one in three persons have a family income below 200% of the federal poverty line.<sup>3</sup> Today, there are many families who, even if they have technically escaped poverty, nevertheless face significant difficulties in meeting basic needs. Wages for lower income workers are, by various accounts, insufficient to support a family and provide a secure future.

A recent study examined whether a minimum wage earner could afford an average two-bedroom apartment in their state of residence. Shockingly, in all 50

states, the answer was no.<sup>4</sup> A recent report from the Federal Reserve shows that four in ten adults could not cover a \$400 emergency expense, or would rely on borrowing or selling something to do so.<sup>5</sup>

Every worker has a right to a just wage according to the criterion of justice, which St. John XXIII described as wages that, "give the worker and his family a standard of living in keeping with the dignity of the human person."<sup>9</sup>

The Church's traditional teaching holds that wages must honor a person's dignity and ability to contribute to the common good of civil society and family well-being. The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of participating in God's creation.

If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected, including the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organizing and joining unions, to private property, and to economic initiative. Business owners and managers have a duty to seek profits to ensure the stability and long-term success of their businesses. However, they also "have an obligation to consider the good of persons and not only the increase of profits."<sup>13</sup>

How are we as Christians, who are members of society, called to respond to the question of wages and justice? First, we are called to live justly in our own lives whether as business owners or workers. Secondly, we are called to stand in solidarity with our poor and vulnerable brothers and sisters. Lastly, we should all work to reform and build a more just society, one which promotes human life and dignity and the common good of all. We also need to recognize the gifts and responsibilities that God has entrusted to each of us.

This Labor Day, let us all commit ourselves "with fear and trembling," to personal conversion of heart and mind and in so doing, "to bring glad tidings to the poor." To the financially poor and to the spiritually poor. AMEN!

[Isaiah 35:4-7a; Ps. 146; James 2:1-5; Mark 7:31-37]

Like most people on the road, when it's time for a meal, I start scanning the shop windows for signs of life. On such occasions, an "open" sign floods me with hope that a warm meal and a cold drink are within my grasp. A "closed" placard, on the other hand, dashes my spirits and sets me back to wandering. I realize it's nothing personal, but when I'm really hungry, it can feel mighty personal, even when the sign politely reads, "Sorry, but we're closed." It's still a shut door where I had hoped to be received.

I happened upon a restaurant with an unusual sign. It said, "Sorry, but we're open." Was it an apology for the food? Or for the humility of the service that awaited me? Was it two different signs on top of each other? No matter: The chutzpah of the place amused me, and I had to step inside. Turned out to be a most pleasant experience.

Other signs on the road, which you may have seen on America's Funniest Videos might include the signs with mistakenly-arranged words. Instead of KIDS EAT FREE, the sign says, EAT KIDS FREE. And, of course, there is the classic sign: EAT HERE AND GET GAS!

The spirit of "open" and "closed" is rarely so nuanced in our experience. We're either welcome or not, in or out, one of the "haves" or the "have-nots." In our dealings with others, and even in our relationship with God, we may find ourselves in a free-flowing exchange or apparently speaking to a brick wall. Nothing is going to change, we may sigh. Ill fortune is our lot. Suffering and death are inevitable. A desert will never produce a spring.

And if we think this way, we are in for a surprise.

The prophet has a word for the timid: Be strong! Fear not! God comes to save. And what salvation means is quite concrete: senses restored, ability regained, hope renewed. In God's plan, the lame man dances. And yes, the desert will produce a river. Any way that has been shut, God can open.

Things are hardly as fixed as they may seem from where we sit in the cheap seats of the cosmos. For one who believes, there is no point when it is

time to hang a closed sign on the human experience and say: “No way!” God always has a way.

We see that sign around the bend when our children make choices that disappoint us, when rejection makes us doubt our worth, when injury brings new limitations to a life already bordered by mortality, and most of all when the angel of death first casts its shadow.

We who are used to separating things into tidy categories of good and bad, rich and poor, worthy and unworthy, are ready to default with a quick judgment when we don't get the response from life we were looking for.

Is this new event in our day the signaling that a door has slammed shut or a new one is opening? If we are too quick to interpret and label our experience, we may never know.

Once upon a time Jesus met a man who couldn't hear and therefore could scarcely speak well enough to be understood. After meeting Jesus, the man could hear and spoke plainly. Jesus says, “Don't tell anyone.” But once a mouth has been opened, it's hard to keep it shut. Pretty soon every mouth in the district of the Decapolis was opened and yammering about this event. “He has done all things well,” they say of Jesus. That was a pretty good assessment.

Before that day, the man who had been brought to Jesus had not encountered much hope that things could be different. And suddenly everything was changed for him. All it took was a finger in his ear, a touch of spit, a groan toward heaven, and faith. We may want to add, “A whole *lot* of faith,” but actually that wouldn't be true. Jesus said a mustard seed of faith would be plenty, enough to move a mountain -- which is a whole lot bigger than a tongue and two ears.

Letting God be God is just about the hardest thing a human being can do. We are, historically and regrettably, control freaks -- about the circumstances of our own lives most of all.

The sad thing is, God as much as gave us the power to lock God out of our lives. But what if we looked at the door and saw, instead of a barrier, a way out? Jesus didn't call himself “the Way” for nothing.



Miracles can happen. Peace is possible. Justice is always a decision away. Grace is available for the asking. Jesus is the One Who does all things well, if we can trust the eyewitnesses. Far from being the Lord of the Damned, Jesus is the One Who saves. A way has been opened for us, and all we have to do is walk through the door to get there.

I conclude on this Grandparents Day, with a brief reflection.

As fun and special as time spent with grandchildren can be, we know that being a grandparent is a supporting -- and not a starring -- role. So, how can grandparents truly make a difference in their grandchildren's lives?

Grandparents have the unique opportunity to be holy role models by continuing to grow in their faith, and by teaching by living the values of the Gospel message in the following ways:

- Putting others first
- Accepting without judging
- Showing compassion to the needy
- Looking with awe at God's creation
- Living peacefully
- Having courage
- Being generous
- Being content with what you have
- Loving unconditionally
- Looking to the future with hope
- Being joyful
- Expressing gratitude

Happy Grandparents Day! AMEN!

[Isaiah 50:4c-9a; Ps. 116; James 2:14-18; Mark 8:27-35]

Once again, our country has been hit with another hurricane, this one named Florence. What has amazed me this time is the extreme organization of first responders, electrical linemen, and carpenters from all over the country who gathered ahead of the hurricane's arrival to be ready to go into action.

This is Catechetical Sunday, a time to remind parents and faith formation teachers about their proper roles in the religious, spiritual and Catholic formation of their children. We might take a moment to distinguish between catechesis and religious education. Catechesis is the work of preparing a person for a full and sincere relationship with Jesus Christ. Religious education, on the other hand, refers to the more general instruction in our religious tradition and practice. It's the difference between knowing Jesus Christ, and knowing about Him. Today, we celebrate the relationship and the process of faith formation.

I used to teach Bible study according to the "facts": who wrote a particular work and when (as far as we know), why it was written, and what it says about then and now. While I still believe those ideas are important to approaching a text with understanding, I now base many Bible lessons on the people in the stories and not just on the ideas.

Human beings enter into relationships with other human beings more naturally than they do with concepts and ideals. Soldiers in a war typically die for their buddies, not for principles. So, too, parents make great sacrifices for their children with faces and names and personal histories more readily than they do with abstract ideas. The story that moves us most powerfully is not about "freedom" or "poverty," but about that woman wearing a burka holding up a finger purpled at the voting booth, or that small boy struggling to make it to the Red Cross refugee camp before he dies.

Every year, a theme is developed for us to reflect upon. This year's theme is "Enlisting Witnesses for Jesus Christ." It ties in with Archbishop Vigneron's call in his pastoral letter, "Unleash the Gospel" to Encounter, Accompany and Witness the Gospel by our choices and by our actions.

Today's readings echo that theme. In today's Gospel, Jesus Christ asks you and me one of the most important questions we will ever face: "Who do YOU say that I am?" Who IS Jesus Christ for you?

Fr. Ed Beck is a Passionist priest who coordinated the weekly Sunday Mass out of New York. He is a handsome man, with prematurely white hair, and steel gray-blue eyes. One day, while travelling the subway from his office to his parish, a stranger kept staring at him and then finally approached him. He shouted, "You're HIM! You're HIM!"

The stranger frantically searched for a pen and paper and said, "I need your autograph, man!" Fr. Beck, not accustomed to this attention replied, "Well, I don't usually do this, but OK." He signed the small piece of paper, "Fr. Ed Beck, CP." The stranger looked at the piece of paper and said, "Fr. Ed Beck? Who's that? I thought you were Anderson Cooper!"

The stranger did not know who Fr. Ed Beck was. Do we know who Jesus Christ is? Is He the Son of God, our Lord, our Savior, the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, the King of Kings, Emmanuel, the Lamb of God?

Or do we expect Jesus to be our personal miracle worker? Mr. Fix It? Santa Claus, who brings us what we want instead of what we truly need? How about a revolutionary, a prophet, a political leader, a superhero? Jesus says that He will suffer greatly, be rejected by His own Jewish leaders, and be killed. But then He adds five important words: "and rise after three days." And those five words would make all the difference in the world, and in eternity. "And rise?"

Peter, at that time, doesn't get it. He is looking for profit, not persecution, winning not losing, success, not failure. But the message of Jesus is different. Take up your cross. Follow Me. Lose your life for the sake of My eternal life. Suffering through our life's work, our homework, our church work gets us there. Are YOU ready to do this? Do YOU have what it takes to be a "joyful, missionary disciple?" You do if you accompany us on the mission of Jesus.

Like the thousands of first responders, electrical linemen, and carpenters from all over the country, we are ready for combat, ready for action, ready to fight for our faith, our community, and our Church.

In our Second Reading, St. James puts it this way: “Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.” In other words, do you have the courage, the guts, to witness to your faith with the people God puts around you – your family, your classmates, your co-workers, and your friends?

As a religious educator, I love learning and believe wholeheartedly in its value to the person of faith. But as a catechist, I know in my heart that learning about Jesus is never enough. If we don’t encounter the God Who loves us, the Jesus Who saves, the Spirit Who inspires, then the sum total of our faith remains stuff we’ve memorized and accept based on the word of others.

“You are the Christ,” we’ll say, and go about our business without thought for the sister who has no food for the day, or the brother who has no place to sleep. Once we vitally encounter Jesus the Crucified and Risen One, Who is teacher and healer and Lord and savior, everything changes. Everything has to.

To follow Jesus involves self-denial. Dear parents, catechists, confirmation candidates: What crosses do you take up? What do you “lose” for the sake of Christ and the Gospel? What good works bring your faith to life? Isaiah’s Suffering Servant accepts his calling even in the face of ridicule and persecution. When have you felt God holding you up in your vocation? How do you stay true to your faith when others ridicule it?

So, who is Jesus Christ for YOU? What is Jesus asking you and your household to do? You are loved and you are needed! Enlist to become a witness to Christ! Encounter. Accompany. Witness. AMEN!

[Wisdom 2:12, 17-20; Ps. 54; James 3:16-4:3; Mark 9:30-37]

Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron asked that his letter be read at all Catholic churches during the weekend of September 22-23:

September 21, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

By now you will have learned that our State Attorney General has launched an investigation into the Catholic Church in Michigan in regard to acts of sexual abuse of minors by clergy, and the ways these cases were handled by bishops and others in authority. Once again, I affirm:

The Archdiocese of Detroit welcomes the Attorney General's investigation and is prepared to fully cooperate. We have worked closely with authorities from all six counties within our archdiocese since 2002, when we shared past case files involving clergy misconduct and committed to turning over all new allegations regardless of when the alleged abuse occurred. The Attorney General investigation is the next phase of our commitment to transparency and healing.

We have full confidence in our safe environment policies put in place and carefully followed for more than 15 years. We remain committed to protecting everyone – especially children and vulnerable adults – and therefore look forward to working closely with officials to determine if there is more we can do to accomplish this goal.

As shepherd of our local church in Detroit, I want to offer my most heartfelt apology for the shame I know you must feel that, because of failures in the Church's leadership, we have come to this point. While shame and embarrassment might be an initial reaction, they are not the most important. First and foremost, in the beginning and throughout, we must keep our focus on the healing of the victim-survivors and on our efforts to keep everyone safe in our parishes, schools and all other dimensions of the Church's life. I renew to you my pledge to lead all of us in striving ever more vigorously to achieve these goals.

Most recently, our response to the sexual abuse crisis has led to

establishing new action steps to hold bishops accountable for our own personal behavior and for how we have dealt with cases of abuse. The U.S. Bishops' Conference has already shared some important decisions about this, and I fully endorse them. Further, I will meet soon with all the priests in the archdiocese to discuss further actions we can take to ensure that my pastoral ministry is characterized by integrity, transparency and accountability.

What I have mentioned so far concerns the actions that need to be taken to strengthen the organizational side of our faith-community. While not seeking to skirt the issue of the need for action, as your pastor, I need also to speak to you about the personal, spiritual response to which God the Father calls us in our current situation. I hear him inviting us to renew our faith in him: that he has raised Jesus from the dead and made him Lord of history, not least the history of our time and place; that in the death and resurrection of Jesus is the power to conquer evil, even sins as heinous as those being uncovered because of this crisis; and that in the outpouring of his precious blood he gives us the singular grace to atone for these sins and heal the wounds that have been inflicted on Christ's Mystical Body, the Church.

In that light, I ask that you enter into a moment of prayer – kneel if you wish – and in spirit join with the priest in this prayer from the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, which I've edited to focus on our community's need for mercy:

Eternal Father, I offer you the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your Dearly Beloved Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, in atonement for the sins of clergy sexual abuse and the failure of those who should have prevented it. For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and give healing to all victim-survivors, their families, and to the whole world.

As I close, I offer again my apology, first of all to victim-survivors and all others so grievously wounded by the sexual abuse of minors by clergy, and for these crimes and failure of leaders to prevent them.

Also, I apologize to all of you, members of the Catholic community, for the hurt these sins have caused you. With the help of God, I will continue to lead us on the path toward being the family of faith God calls us to be.

Saint Anne, pray for your Church in Detroit. Blessed Solanus, pray for us.  
Sincerely yours in Christ,  
The Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron Archbishop of Detroit

### Homily

In this Sunday's readings, we face wickedness: jealousy destroying what is good, selfishness causing harm to others, and pride squashing those who get in the way. It is a good, providential basis for the Archbishop's letter.

The First Reading covers the evil doings of outsiders who oppressed the Israelite nation. In the Gospel reading, Jesus predicts the evil doings of spiritual outsiders who were fighting against His ministry. The letter of James addresses the worst wickedness of all: the battle within the Church -- Christians against Christians. Jealousy and selfishness are usually the root beneath every scandal in the Church, every division on the parish staff, every discord among ministries, every disappointed volunteer who feels pushed out, every broken relationship in Christian families, and every attitude that chases weaker Catholics away from the faith -- it's all wicked!

To get at the root of any divisive problem, look for self-centered ambition. Honestly and objectively identify even the most subtle forms of it so that you can also identify God's antidote. When you see divisiveness in others, do you feel sorrow for them? If not, why not? The answer to that usually lies in our own self-centered pride. Jesus provided the cure for this: "If anyone wishes to be first" (which is a desire motivated by selfish ambition) "you must become the servant of all." Selfish ambition is sinful because it tries to grab success away from others. James pointed out that whatever we're ambitious for, if it's good, we can have it simply by asking God for it and working in collaboration with the Holy Spirit to achieve our goals -- but not if we want it only to satisfy our personal, selfish passions.

God gives us what we pray for when it will benefit the parish community or the entire family or those we are called to serve in our ministries. When we desire something for the sake of how it will help others (rather than just for our own

benefit), this desire is pure, peaceable, gentle, compliant, and full of mercy and will produce good fruits.

When have you suffered from the jealousies and selfish ambitions of others in the Church? How did this affect your faith? Did it motivate you to avoid committing the same sin?

Identify how jealousy and selfish ambition have been the underlying cause behind one problem you've witnessed or personally experienced in the Church. How can these scandals be healed through a pure heart, a peaceful response, gentleness, mercy, and good fruits that turn a tragedy into a triumph?

It won't be easy. People will ridicule us, badger us, and even shame us into not doing what Jesus wants us to do. Look at the figure in today's First Reading. The Suffering Servant will do just that, suffer. But the evil ones who will do the inflicting of pain and suffering let words of truth slip out between their grinding teeth. "The just one is the son of God." "God will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes." "We have proof of his gentleness and patience." "God will take care of him."

When Archbishop Allen Vigneron became Archbishop of Detroit in January of 2009, he made clear his mission and message for us: "To share Christ in and through the Church." Nine years later, he challenges us to "Unleash the Gospel" as Christ's joyful, missionary disciples. He also mentioned that this is the only way to genuine and lasting happiness. To do what Jesus Christ came to do. To follow Jesus in carrying our crosses, whatever they may be. To realize that there is more to life than just this life and to work for happiness in eternal life.

This is how we receive Jesus Christ like little children: loving, trusting, serving, and knowing that even if we go beyond our comfort zone for the sake of ministry and service to the community, even if we give from our wallets until it hurts, even if we give God time for prayer, and our family and households the gift of time and love, we do this to Him. We give ourselves to Him. We honor, serve and worship Him. Welcome the message, welcome the messenger, and you will be welcoming God Himself. What better way to be happy than that? AMEN!



[Numbers 11:25-29; Psalm 19; James 5:1-6; Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48]

Blanche and her friends had been in charge of the Mothers' Club at their parish for years. They'd hosted lots of events, raised a lot of money for the religious education program, and had a lot of fun. Lately, though, it seemed the younger mothers were not getting involved, and a good amount of their meeting was spent griping that the same old people were doing all the work.

Then a new family moved into the neighborhood and Cindy, the wife, had a lot of ideas. A few women on her block got caught up in her enthusiasm, and soon they planned a Halloween event for parents and their children. They made one tactical mistake, however. They didn't get the approval of the Mothers' Club or from Blanche first.

What made things worse was that when the day of the Halloween festival came, the event was a huge success. Blanche and her friends were livid. They went to the pastor to complain. He kindly asked why they were so upset. He helped them realize the newcomer was only trying to do her part to help the community, and he made a plan to invite both groups to lunch at the rectory to share some parish history, exchange new ideas, and get to know one another. As Jesus said in this Sunday's reading, "Whoever is not against us is for us."

Moses' assistant Joshua was a pretty reliable foot soldier through those long years in the desert, but he nearly wiggled out when Eldad and Medad started prophesying. The spirit of prophecy had been given to the 70 elders who had gathered outside the camp with Moses according to God's design. Joshua thoroughly approved of that, because the power was bestowed through the proper channels. But Eldad and Medad, who were on the original list, had not gone out to the Tent of God's Presence and therefore didn't qualify for the great prophecy sound-off. "Moses, my lord," Joshua implores respectfully, "stop them!"

Moses calls Joshua's response what it was: the spirit of jealousy. Joshua was jealous for Moses' sake (and for his own maybe by extension). Joshua didn't want the authority of his leader to be shaken by what appeared to be a rival source of power in the camp.

But Moses, secure in the Lord he served, was not at all threatened by this unforeseen development. "Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets!" he exclaims. If proclaiming the Word of the Lord was a good thing, then how could it be bad if more people were doing it? By dismissing Joshua's concern, Moses shows that the gift of prophecy belonged to God and not to Moses himself. What God did with the divine gifts was God's business and not his.

Jesus soothes his frazzled disciples after they saw a person clearly not of their company driving out demons in Jesus' name. "Whoever is not against us is for us," He points out calmly. Those who deceive others with lies will pay the penalty of corrupting the innocent, so we needn't be jealous on God's account: Justice will be served. But the good news is, there is more truth going around than we may be aware of.

In today's Second Reading, St. James speaks truth to power, and truth to wealth. The words are not pretty, but they convict the guilty. We need to hear the truth. And sometimes, hearing the truth is painful.

There is a deep and dramatic search for truth today, in our Church, in our country, even in Washington, D. C.!

The bottom line is that truth belongs to God, like any other spiritual reality, and it is up to God where it may be found. If more people have access to the truth than just our group, isn't that cause for rejoicing? Only the spirit of jealousy insists on copyrighting and controlling a gift so precious and so obviously good.

Creation is a commonwealth of sorts. God intended the goods of the world to be shared among all. The catechism insists upon a "universal destination of goods" that arises from God's love for all creatures and not just a select few. Pope Benedict XVI spoke of the precious gifts of truth, goodness and beauty as being the three ways to get closer to God. Which means that lies, evil and ugliness move us further away from God and the life of grace. We can presume that truth is among those things God delights in sharing across the board, for which the proper response on our part can only be gratitude. AMEN!