

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

In case you haven't figured it out after my ten years of being here, God has blessed me with a very vivid and creative imagination and a well-developed sense of humor! This can be both a blessing and a curse. I visualize the people in today's Gospel amputating their hand, their foot and their eye. If we had to do that because of the sins we commit with our hand (touching something we are not supposed to, taking something we are not supposed to, striking someone with our hand), or because of the sins we commit with our feet (that take us where we should not go or where we should not be, or kicking another), or our eye (looking at stuff we are not supposed to be looking at), I picture us limping along, with one arm missing, and with partial blindness. The great diplomat from India, Mahatmas Gandhi famously once said, "If we always take an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, there would be a lot of blind and toothless people bumping into each other!"

One time when I was home for the weekend from the seminary, I was reviewing the Rite of Anointing of the Sick and the Last Rites. In the new ritual, all I anoint is the forehead and the palms of the hands. But in the old rite, all extremities were anointed along with the following prayer, "May God deliver you from all the sins you have committed with your mind, your eyes, your ears, your hands, your feet and your nose. I asked my mom who sitting nearby, "What sin can you possibly commit with your nose?" Without missing a beat, she said, "Sticking it someone else's business!"

This weekend in September has been designated for quite a while now as the weekend to take up as a special collection for the Priest's Pension Plan all across the Archdiocese of Detroit. This year's theme is "With Thanks for Their Service in Christ."

I thank all of the diocesan priests, who by "their service in Christ" shaped me and molded me into the priest that I am today. All of them have all gone to their eternal reward: Fr. Bohdan Kosicki, Fr. Leo Lulko, Fr. Ted Blaszczyk, Fr. Donald E. Bartone, and Monsignor Jerry Flanagan. Add Fr. Jim Sheehan, Bishop Ken Untener and Cardinal John Dearden. At age 70 in two weeks, I will now become one of those "senior priests." Younger priests have told me how I inspire them and give them hope... Plus a few laughs on the side!

Did you know that the street next to the church was named after then-Archbishop John Dearden? The story goes that Fr. Art Krawczak, the founding pastor of this parish, had just completed this church building and it was ready for the dedication. Having great political influence at the time, he convinced the City of Warren officials to designate the street next to our church as Dearden Street.

Fr. Art made sure the street sign was up when the Archbishop arrived. Fr. Art pointed out the roadway honor. Archbishop Dearden was appreciative but not amused. He looked up and down the street, smiled with a twinkle in his eye and said to Fr. Art, "It is only one block long and it is a dead-end street. Bishop Schoenherr's street stretches out for miles and covers two counties!"

My priest colleagues have gotten older-looking and heavier. Yet most of the newly-ordained and recently-ordained priests of

Detroit are fit and look like they just graduated from high school! One of the issues we talk about is change. How priesthood has changed, how the Church has changed.

Changes in the Church cause division among believers. It is a painful experience, one that at first glance should be avoided, discouraged and perhaps even crushed. But having members in our Church that push for a clearer understanding of our teachings and practices may result in growth and development for the Body of Christ. Change is necessary for a growing body.

History has shown that change is usually difficult to accept, and those who push for radical change are often expelled, excommunicated or persecuted.

In two of our readings today, we see changes happening in the outpouring and the action of the Holy Spirit. And we see how both Moses and Jesus are tolerant of those who do not fully fit the mold of the disciples. Moses and Jesus are entirely open to those who had not been recruited and trained in the “officially sanctioned and approved” methods and procedures of their religion. Jesus wasn’t!

These two great leaders both use the same criteria in judging whether to silence those who are accused of “rocking the boat” or to allow them to go on their own way.

Were these “disturbers” doing harm or doing good by their activities? Were they hindering or promoting God’s work?

What do you make of Jesus saying, “Whoever is not against us is with us?” How do we show that we are “for” Jesus? How have we witnessed, as individuals and as a faith community, to our beliefs, our Christian actions and our commitment to be disciples of the Lord?

During Ordinary Time, we are exposed to lessons as disciples. The lesson this week includes a warning against spiritual jealousy.

- Has the multiplying of ministries been a cause of jealousy in you? “Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets!”

Do you welcome the proclaiming of truth wherever it might be found? 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. And it’s not ours, either.

- What virtues (e.g., openness and flexibility) do you need to grow in order to work better together in ministry and service?

Let us make our words the words of Saint Pope John XXIII:

“In essential matters, let there be unity;  
in nonessential matters, liberty;  
and in all matters, charity.”

And as Pope Francis says at the end of each of his talks and visits: “Pray for me. I need it.” AMEN!