

## St Pius-St Anthony 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2nd

This poor unknown servant of Jesus in the gospel today! Have you ever been in one of those situations (rock & hard place) where people say ‘you can’t win for losing?’ They mean even when I intend to lose (to throw the game), ‘unluck’ would have it, that is the one game I win! We often say it when we feel stuck at a crossroads, going right is a bad choice & going left is a bad choice! What do you do? I think this un-named servant of Jesus feels that way in the gospel today. He has found Jesus, which means he has converted and now dedicates his life to serving Christ; he is out doing good in Jesus’ name (casting out demons), and then suddenly he meets John the apostle. AND John shuts him down (What is John doing, he even tells on himself to Jesus, *‘Master we saw someone ministering in your name and we stopped him because he doesn’t belong to us--Mark 9:38*). Of course, Jesus says, “What? He doesn’t belong to you; even you, said he worked in Jesus’ name?” Sounds like John is being the copyright/trademark police, checking union cards, or worse, acting like the Taliban extremists with rulers checking burka lengths! The NT word for that is ‘Pharisees’. Of course, in response to John, Jesus says, “Don’t stop good; and in my name his work is doubly good-always give such good the benefit of doubt- Why would you oppose my name and good!” So, let’s review this episode rundown from the unnamed servant’s perspective. Before Christ, he had been living a selfish life, doing his own thing, pushing others around to get ahead, making a name for himself. Then one day he hears a good Christian disciple call for conversion, or he catches some words of Jesus somewhere in a synagogue, on hillside or lakeshore, And it happens that his life is turned around. Converting, he is a changed man. He joins Jesus’ kingdom movement and begins sharing the new life God has opened to him- Great! UNTIL, he meets John. John throws a blanket over his on-fire faith, closing down the man’s ministry in Jesus’ name. The unnamed man has to question: What, can’t win for losing? Previous way of life, bad and now this new Jesus way of life, bad! What gives? This all reminds me of when I worked in college, I was on an outside grounds maintenance crew. One day, the janitor had called in sick and I was pulled inside and told by my boss to go straighten up the office area, empty trash, check/wipe down glass on door/windows, tidy bathrooms, and vacuum floors. So off I go, dutifully enjoying the inside air conditioning for once! Until I start vacuuming, not into two minutes and an irate accountant-head busts into hallway demanding that I stop immediately. “Okay, I get it. You are on phone, but I was told to do this.” But I still had to face my own boss- I

know what he told me to do, so I thought “Grab a broom/Sweep up any big stuff from the carpet.” Until the same department head, charged out again demanding that I stop at once because ‘We all have allergies-You stir up dust’! So stuck in such a trap, I walked back over to our shop and reported it to Eddie. He smiled at me, and said ‘Well, tomorrow just come in at 6:00 and get it all done before they show up.” To which I just said, “Sure I will, but remember what corporate says ‘I’m entry level worker/having to be supervised, so you are coming in with me, too!”

But I have to think that this unnamed servant of Jesus had to feel that way-‘By converting, stopped living his way of life, and now trying to share this amazing grace of Christ, he is stopped again. Now what? We can hope for the best that he wasn’t discouraged and turned away from Christ because of this bullying by John. I find that is why Jesus goes on to say in 9:42 *“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe [in me] to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.”* Believers ought never to discourage-work against other believers. I suggest Jesus is calling John to consider the devastating consequences of his zealous, and jealous territorialism? What if this unknown servant is so deflated by John’s chewing out, that he reverts back to his unsaved previous life? That is what we call bad witness in Christianity. When people (we) who bear Christ’s name might not be good reflections of Christ’s heart to other people? If that is us, then we need to repent? We surely do not want to chase people way from Christ? If I do not reflect Christ to others, I need to repent. Heavens no - I am scared to consider it, **but could it be** that I might be the reason someone else doesn’t come to church? I need to be a good witness, a representative, a good disciple of his and certainly not prevent others from coming to Christ, or being called to Him and serving Him in their own way (is it because it isn’t ‘My Way?’ Well of course, it’s not meant to be ‘my’ way.) I don’t want to seem to be picking on John-who am I?-, but I note that Jesus didn’t call him and James ‘sons of thunder’ for nothing (nicest way of saying ‘thunderous-rowdy boys’-Mark 3:17). And there’s more on them. That’s for another day-over the next couple weeks we’ll hear more about their issues (stay tuned). But this leads to the next couple verses in our gospel, when Jesus calls everyone to watch & be careful of their quick judgements: paying attention first to their own sins before stepping up to point others’ sins out. Is my business in order, before I meddle in yours? In verses 9:43, 44, 47 Jesus commnds, “If your hand, foot or eye causes you (emphasis on ‘YOU’ to each of us) to sin,

cut them off". He is asking us to look at our own hands, feet and eyes- again he said 'your'- he didn't say "If your neighbor's hand or foot causes sin, cut them off for them" He wants us to examine our own lives. If something leads me to sin, (whatever it is: a TV, a Phone, any substance, a place or location, any habit, we call all those 'near occasions of sin', then cut it out- stay clear of it, avoid it- whatever one's corrupting addiction is- Is it potato chips? Then don't bring them into the house, stop cruising the potato chip aisle in grocery. Is it an 'angry' TV show, or a 'Fleshy' TV show (anything 'Sinsational'-yes with an 'I') that leads to sin-then stop watching it. Cut the cord to that input, and those messages. Today's gospel has Jesus commanding us to examine our own witness. How do we reflect him to others? And do we support others who serve and bear His name, even if it isn't my way, (John)? So our good witness begins, and we truly share Christ with others, by taking care first our own heart-getting right & letting His grace perfect, correct this space here first (correcting myself). But it takes Jesus. We have to ask Him to work in us, and to lead us to recognize Him working others.