

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME–2024

There is a story about a monastery in Europe perched high on a cliff several hundred feet in the air. The only way to reach the monastery was to be suspended in a basket which was pulled to the top by several monks who pulled and tugged with all their strength. Obviously the ride up the steep cliff in that basket demanded an extra dose of faith. One tourist got exceedingly nervous about half-way up as he noticed that the rope by which he was suspended was old and frayed. With a trembling voice he asked the monk who was riding with him in the basket how often they changed the rope. The monk thought for a moment and answered brusquely, "Whenever it breaks."

In last week's second reading, we heard James speak about the harmful and negative impact that jealousy and selfishness can have on a community, whatever that community might be: whether it be a family, a group of people working together, or even people gathered in the name of religion. He reminds us that the real dangers to a community don't come from the outside, but from within and, if left unchecked, the effects can be devastating.

In both the first reading and the Gospel, we see some of that jealousy surfacing and you get the sense that even in these early stages of community building, there are already exclusionary clicks being formed and those who think they are part of them, want to keep others out. Joshua complains to Moses about Eldad and Medad, while John complains to Jesus about the person who was helping others but wasn't in the "in crowd." Both are reprimanded for their short sightedness and we all get a powerful lesson in tolerance, a lesson that we all need to learn and put into practice.

Our Catholic Faith can be called a religion of delegation or a sharing in the same mission, power, and authority that the Father handed on to Jesus and what Jesus handed on to the disciples and what gets handed on to all of us. This happens through our baptism and we all have a very necessary part and role to play. To a more or less degree, yet nonetheless equally important, we all have been entrusted some different types of leadership roles in our lives. While what we have received is definitely for our own personal benefit, at the same time, it is also meant to be shared with others. Problems come in when we fail to recognize or accept that each of us has something necessary and important to offer; or when we hang on to what we have received and refuse to share it with others or become jealous of others, fearful that they are trying to take something away from us. As we say over and over again, we are all in this together and how we get to where we are going is just as important, maybe even more important, than getting there.

In these days what is happening in our country and our world, in these days of the Road to Renewal, our diminishing numbers and our own personal challenges, it is even more important

now that we all try to encourage as many people as possible to be actively involved in our continuing mission of welcoming others and also to help one another truly feel a part of what is going on here. No one person can do it alone and the need to empower others and entrust them with real leadership roles with real authority, that need should be obvious. Along with that need, is the need for all to work together in a spirit of trust and tolerance, open to each other's gifts and talents and, very importantly, to be open to the differences in our personalities and ways of doing things.

There is an old eastern fable. A man possessed a beautiful opal ring; it was thought that it had special power because everyone who wore it became a very generous and kind person, one that everyone admired and held in high esteem. The ring was always passed down from father to son, and always it did its work. As time went on, it came to a father who had three sons whom he loved with an equal love. What was he to do when the time came to pass on the ring? The father got two other rings made precisely the same so that none could tell the difference. On his death-bed he called each of his sons in; he expressed his love to each of them and to each, without telling the others, gave each ring. When the three sons discovered that each had a ring, a great dispute arose as to which was the true ring, so they decided to take the case to a wise judge. He examined the rings and then he spoke. "I cannot tell which is the magic ring," he said, "but you yourselves can prove it." "How can we prove it?" they asked the wise man. He said, "If the true ring gives real character to one who wears it, then I and all the other people in the city will know the man who possesses the true ring by the goodness of his life. So, go your ways, and be kind, be truthful, be brave, be just in your dealings, and the one who does these things will be the owner of the true ring." Each thinking that they had the right ring, they began to live their lives as the wise man told them and in the end, it dawned on them that the ring itself had no power; the real power came from within each of them.

The same can be said for us and what we are called to do. There is something wonderful, special and powerful within each of us and that if we are willing trust one another and work together, we will be able to continue to do wonderful things; more people will come to know the love that God has for them and they too will have that wonderful experience of belonging to something very wonderful. And so, whatever gets in the way of that, as we hear in the Gospel, we need to cut it out and get rid of it. Time is short and there is so much good to do. And, as St. Francis said, "While we have time, let us do good." May we allow God's peace to fill our hearts and guide our lives.