

SANCTUS SPIRITUS FONDS VERITATIS

*A Homily for the Twenty-sixth Sunday of the Year (B)
St. Paul's Parish, Gävle, Sweden.*

Texts: Numbers 11:25-29; Ps. 18; James 5: 1-6; Mark 9:38-43.45.47-48.

The Holy Spirit is the source of all truth. St Thomas Aquinas rightly wrote, "All truth, by whomever it is spoken comes from the Holy Spirit." This should not surprise us since we know that the One God in Three Persons is the Creator, the Saviour and the Sanctifier. Everyone is God's creature, God's child. He gives his gifts, without discrimination, to whomever he wills, just as he sends his rain to fall on all peoples and his sun to give light and warmth to all. We have just heard about the drama that took place when God decided to give Moses some co-workers. He took some of the spirit that was on him and put on the seventy elders and they spoke the words of the Lord. But there were two others who were not at the camp but who also received the gift of prophecy just as the seventy did. In the Gospel Reading we heard a similar story. John had a report for the Lord. There was a man who was casting out devils in the name of Jesus and the disciples tried to stop him because he was not one of them. The answer that the Lord gave them is very instructive: no one who believes in Jesus and invokes his name to cast out the Devil would soon after speak evil of Jesus. And so, whoever is not against us is for us.

The reaction of the servant of Moses and the reaction of John the Apostle is also usually our first reaction when we hear that a person who does not belong to our Church is being used by the Holy Spirit. When Peter was sent to the house of the centurion, Cornelius, a non-Jew who worshipped the true God, he and his companions were amazed that the Holy Spirit came down upon Cornelius and his people just he had come down upon them on the day of Pentecost (Cf. Acts 10: 44-45). The insight of Peter and the teaching of the Lord in the Gospel reading of today are the same: ***"Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him"*** (Acts 10: 34-35).

At times we see people who do not belong to our Church - at times people who are not known to be very religious – who do things that are in accord with the Gospel. We see people who fight against injustice and dehumanization of God's people. We see people who do heroic things in service of humanity.

These people, Christian or not, got their inspiration from the same Holy Spirit who leads us to do the same things.

On the other hand, there are some people who, by their baptism, belong to the Catholic Church, but whose lifestyle and public utterances show that they are inspired, not by the Holy Spirit but by the Evil Spirit. While claiming their membership of the Church, they speak against the teaching of Christ – they openly speak against Christ and his Church. From the Gospel we have read, today, we know what the mind of the Lord is about such people. It is this: “Anyone who is against us is not for us.” No one who attacks Christ and his Church can still claim to belong to him or his Church.

That the Holy Spirit can inspire and use others who are not members of the Church should not worry us. It should rather make us to praise God for his generosity. It would be foolish for anyone to seek the power of the Holy Spirit outside the Church when the ordinary channel of the Spirit’s action is in the Church. Fr Raneiro Cantalamessa tells us, ***“The action of the Spirit of Christ outside the Church is not the same as his action in the Church and in the sacraments. Outside he acts by his power; in the Church he acts by his presence, in person.”***

We all have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Lord wants us to keep the gifts alive. There are things that render the gifts we have received ineffective. For the gifts to be alive in us, we have to be fully faithful to the Lord at all times. The teaching of the Lord is clear: let nothing be an obstacle in our relationship with God. Neither wealth nor relationships nor anything should come between God and us.

There is a persistent temptation for many in the world to think that earthly riches can give people happiness. Many wrongly think that the wealthiest are the happiest. But now and again we are shown how the very rich, especially those who have cheated others to amass wealth, are miserable. St James addresses such people as we listen. Let us ask ourselves if we are in any way cheating others to amass material wealth. If we are, today is the day of opportunity. We are called to repent and restore all we have stolen. Those who persist in the life of estrangement from the Lord have no peace in this life and, in the life to come, they will face eternal damnation.

*From presumption restrain your servant and let it not rule me.
Then shall I be blameless, clean from grave sin (Psalm 18: 14).*

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Gävle, Sweden: 27 September 2009.***