



September 30, 2012
Twenty-sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time

"Anyone who is not against us is with us."

Mark 9:40

Dear Friends;

There was a time in the history of our Catholic Church where our relationship with others was extremely antagonistic. For example rather than seeing Protestants or Orthodox as fellow believers in Jesus, they were categorized as heretics or schismatics. The definitions of who is "in" and who is "out" were tightly and clearly defined.

This came to affect how we treated others. I recently heard a woman tell how growing up she was told that only Catholics would go to heaven. Her one set of grandparents were Episcopalian. She said as a child she was deeply concerned that these grandparents were going to hell for not being Catholic.

My maternal grandmother, Margaret was Methodist. When she married my grandfather, Edward Gresher, they were married in the parlor of the rectory. This was because the Archbishop of Chicago back in the early 1940's would not permit a Catholic to marry a non-Catholic in the church building. My grandmother was the most Christian woman I ever knew. She always found good in everyone. As a child I used to think how horrible that she was not allowed to have her wedding in the church.

Jesus' culture was tightly defined by family and social relationships. Strangers and those not part of the circle of intimates were always classified as outsiders and probably enemies. So the disciples are concerned about someone who was not part of the group using the name of Jesus to successfully expel a demon. They want a clear definition of who is part of the group and who is not. They also may be insecure and jealous because they just previously tried to expel a demon and were unsuccessful.

Jesus response to the disciples is to define the circle of those "with us" as large. They were using my name to do good so they cannot speak badly of me. If they are not against us they are with us.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) thankfully moved us from a narrowly defined understanding of Catholicism to a broad understanding of Christianity. The Council taught while we believe that the fullness of the Church of Jesus Christ is in the Catholic Church there are parts of that Church found in other Churches and ecclesial communities. The Council also recognized that God is also at work today in the Chosen People—the Jewish people and even in non-Christian religions. Even atheists may have something to teach us!

The Council sees the mission of the Church in the world is to build up the unity of humankind and all creation, *"...the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men..."* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) We are not called to be an elite group but a servant people who help build up the unity of all people. If they are not against us they are with us.

Oh and I am sure Margaret Gresher is in heaven praying with all the saints in glory!

Peace,

Fr. Ron