

St Mary's Concord
A Reflection based on the Homily for
26th Sunday of Ordinary Time
26 September 2021

READINGS YEAR B: Numbers 11:16-17, 25-29; James 5:1-6; Mark 9:38-43, 45-48

To contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus all churches have been closed since 26 June 2021. One Mass is permitted so that it can be livestreamed to the parish YouTube channel and to the parish Facebook page: "St Mary's Parish Church Concord". The following reflection is based on the homily from that Mass.

"Sitting on the fence" is an expression that we use for someone who doesn't want to take sides. The argument may be about some complex moral issue or simply about the winner in a football game.

It can be a positive statement, but it can also be a criticism. "To sit on the fence" may suggest that someone is not ready to make a commitment. "Which side are you on?" may be the question. But must there always be sides? What happens when instead of sitting on the fence, we pull down the fence?

The American poet Robert Frost wrote a poem about walls and fences:

"Before I build a wall, I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence."

Sometimes, we build walls and fences to keep people in and at other times to keep people out. Fences do both. The fence around a school is there to protect the children and it does that by keeping people out and the children in.

But there are also walls and fences that are not about safety. They are built to keep people apart. Sometimes we also build walls to protect our own position of power.

We can be like Joshua in the 1st Reading who was jealously guarding his status. Moses had been instructed to gather 70 elders. But when two others, who were not among the chosen, also received the spirit of Moses, Joshua wanted Moses to stop them prophesying in the camp.

"Are you jealous for my sake?" asked Moses. He understood that Joshua was only wanting to protect his own status, and so he added "would that all the Lord's people were prophets."

For Moses, God's gift was to be shared not jealously guarded.

We listened to that story from the Book of Numbers to shine a light on the Gospel reading. In Mark's Gospel, John, one of the sons of Zeberdee, tried to stop someone, who was not one of the disciples, from casting out demons in the name of Jesus.

Like Joshua, John wanted to protect his own position of power.

Last Sunday we heard how the disciples had been arguing about who would be the greatest. That prompted Jesus to take a small child in his arms and declare that his Mission was about service not power.

In another scene in Mark's Gospel, as we will hear three weeks from now, it becomes clear that John and his brother James, still had not understood the message of Jesus. In that scene, the brothers ask Jesus for the key positions of power when Jesus achieves his glory (Mk 10:35-40).

Here, when John reported what he had done, Jesus rebuked him: "Anyone who is not against us is for us". It is a message we also need to hear.

To share in the Mission of Jesus is to build bridges not fences. We do that when we accept that we do not have a monopoly on the gifts of the Spirit. The Spirit is at work in the lives of people inside and outside the structures of the Church.

Next Sunday we will join with parish communities throughout Australia to celebrate the opening of the National Plenary Council (for more details see this Sunday's Parish Bulletin).

We will be praying that those who will participate in the Plenary Council will be open to discern how the Spirit is at work among us. That means not only seeking the gifts of the Spirit within the formal structures of the Church, but also among those on the fringe and those who feel they have been excluded.

Over several recent Sundays we have also listened to the Letter of James as our second reading. The author was clearly addressing a divided community. And as we have heard again today, a significant issue was discrimination that was based on economic and social status.

If we want to build bridges within own community and with other communities, we first need to recognise the things that divide us. We then need to find ways to listen to each other before we set about designing the bridge that we think is needed.

Hopefully, that will be the path adopted by the Plenary Council as the delegates seek to respond to the challenge of proclaiming the Gospel in 21st century Australia.

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