

## Fr. Michael's Homily - *Green is the Spring*

### **Gospel: Mark 9:38-40**

John said to Jesus,

"Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us."

Jesus replied, "Do not prevent him.

There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us."

### **Homily Transcript — *Green is the Spring***

As I mentioned at the beginning of Mass, it's been a long time since you've seen green vestments. We journey through Lent with the purple vestments, occasionally punctuated by the red of a martyr. Then we entered into the joyful season of Easter, with its white vestments, occasionally punctuated by the red of martyrs. Just recently we celebrated the feast of Pentecost with the bright red and now it's back to ordinary time with the green vestments.

Green, the color of growth. Green, the color of spring. Green, the color of new life. Ordinary time, the ordinary work of being a Christian is living in the life of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. What is that life but to open ourselves to ever greater unity in the holy name of Jesus?

Our gospel today points out that John, the beloved disciple, John who in his later years would simply say, "Love one another. Love one another. Love one another." is a much younger John in today's gospel. Like so many of us, he's caught up in petty arguments and jealousies. He comes to Jesus with this big problem: 'There's somebody casting out demons but he's not with us. He's not part of the chosen ones. He's using your name trying to cast out demons. Stop him!' And Jesus rightly corrects the young disciple.

Anyone who does a good deed in my name cannot be against us. If they are not against us, then they're for us; they're with us and let's cooperate with that grace. My memory goes back to a time almost exactly a year ago when I had the opportunity to travel over to Rome and be part of the Pentecost celebration. You may remember me talking about that and it was the only opportunity I've had in my life to meet one-on-one in a small group with the Holy Father and shake his hands and have a brief conversation with him.

The occasion was a celebration of Pentecost and Pope Francis invited about 100 ecumenical evangelical leaders from around the country to join him in Rome for the celebration of the 50 years of the Catholic charismatic renewal. Pope Francis, wise leader that he is, realizes the Christian community is divided as we celebrate Eucharist. We have different theologies and different understandings of what a Eucharist is; different understandings of what priesthood is; different understanding of how holy ordination takes place. But, we are united in our celebration

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of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are united in proclaiming that Jesus is Lord and that there is great power in proclaiming the holy name of Jesus.

That is what today's gospel lifts up: "Teacher we saw someone driving out demons in your name." [There is] great power in the holy name of Jesus. So Pope Francis invited these evangelical leaders to come with him to celebrate the holy name of Jesus; to celebrate this outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

We joined together in the Circus Maximus, which 2000 years ago was used for the Roman gladiators and the chariot races and for the Christians being thrown to the lions. Countless Christian martyrs lost their lives there 2000 years ago and here they gathered together in this joyful celebration of the holy name of Jesus. Up on the stage was of course Pope Francis and then the Cardinals on the Pope's left and the evangelical leaders on the right-hand side. In front of the Holy Father on the left-hand side were a large gathering of bishops and then on the right-hand side where the lesser evangelical leaders and one Catholic priest. Can you guess who that was? Behind them were 80,000 Catholic charismatic Christians filling the Circus Maximus. The theme of that conference, personally chosen by Pope Francis, was printed on a large banner: Jesus is Lord.

Pope Francis chose that theme because he knew that it would unite the Christian community. Every Christian of every denomination can stand behind the phrase, "Jesus is Lord." If we want to pick a fight and we want to parse out our differences there's lots of things that we can fight about and say, "We don't agree on this. We don't agree on this. We don't agree on this. We don't agree on this." And everybody just gets mad and goes their own way.

What Francis did was say, "What do we agree on? We agree that Jesus is Lord of our life. We agree that the holy name of Jesus has the power to cast out demons and the holy name of Jesus unites us in the gifting of the Holy Spirit."

We celebrated that almost exactly a year ago and that message is as needed today as it ever has been. We can find lots of things to disagree on, what can we find to agree on? Pope Francis uses the phrase "reconciled differences." Reconciled differences. In other words, there may be some things that we're just never going to see eye to eye on. Can we agree to disagree in this area and cooperate on the areas that we do agree on?

I was talking to one of those evangelical leaders who met in a private conference with Pope Francis for almost 2 hours trying to work toward greater unity among the churches. At the end of the conference, Pope Francis turned to him and tapped him on the chest and said, "We hear the same music. We hear the same music." That's what unites us. When we listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who drives out the presence of evil within our midst: the evils of jealousy, the evils of fear, the evils of anxiety.

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That's what James talks about in his first letter today. He said, "Don't presume that you're gonna be able to live a long life. Don't even presume that you're going to be here tomorrow. We can't take a single day of our life for granted." He says, "When you speak to one another, say: 'If the Lord willing, I'll be there.' Don't presume that we're going to live a long life."

We could walk out of this church today and be hit by a drunk driver. We could walk out of this church or we could be sitting in Mass here and have a heart attack. James says, "Don't presume upon the Lord. Live each day in the gracious goodness of the Lord, trusting in his mercy to guide us. Pray that our hearts are open to receive whatever it is the Lord wants us to receive."

Father Richard Rohr has, I think rightly, remarked that the great contribution of America to world spirituality is the 12-step program. The 12-step program is for people whose lives have been devastated by addiction. The short form of the prayer that is prayed at every 12-step meeting, whether it's Alcoholics Anonymous, or drug addicts anonymous, or gamblers anonymous, or overeaters anonymous, whatever the addiction is, the one prayer that unites all of those meetings is the serenity prayer. The prayer was written by Reinhold Niebuhr and they use the short form of the prayer at their meetings.

I just want to close reminding you of this prayer that I'm sure you've heard from time to time. It's a prayer of living in the present moment; not letting our minds run to fear of the future; not being drawn into the anxiety of the past; but trusting in God's grace and the power of Jesus's name to guide us through this present moment.

### The [FULL] Serenity Prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)

God, give us grace to accept with serenity  
the things that cannot be changed,  
Courage to change the things  
which should be changed,  
and the Wisdom to distinguish  
the one from the other.

Living one day at a time,  
Enjoying one moment at a time,  
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,  
Taking, as Jesus did,  
This sinful world as it is,  
Not as I would have it,  
Trusting that You will make all things right,  
If I surrender to Your will,  
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,  
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.

Amen? Amen.