

26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – B
Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48; Numbers 11:25-29

In today's Sunday readings, I'd like to invite you to reflect with me on how we relate to one another, how we can foster unity rather than division, and how we are called **to build bridges rather than walls**. Both our Gospel and 1st Readings are pointing to the reality that God's graciousness and freedom can never be restricted to exclusivity but for the inclusion and enrichment of all humanity.

First Reading: Numbers 11:25-29

- we hear the story of Eldad and Medad, two men who, though not in the formal gathering of the seventy elders, receive the Spirit of God and begin to prophesy. Joshua, feeling insecure with his exclusive mentality, runs to Moses and asks him to stop them.
- Moses' response is remarkable. Instead of being possessive of God's gift, Moses says, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit on them!"
- Moses recognizes that God's grace is abundant and not restricted by human boundaries. He is focused not on limiting God's work but on expanding it. In this way, Moses builds bridges, encouraging a spirit of inclusion and openness.
- This openness is the hallmark of genuine spiritual leadership. He sees that God's Spirit can work through unexpected people in unexpected ways, and he embraces this.

Gospel: Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

- In the Gospel, John raises a similar concern with Jesus: "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop because he was not one of us." Much like Joshua, John is troubled by someone outside their group performing a good work in Jesus' name.
- But Jesus' response is clear: "Do not stop him... Whoever is not against us is for us." Jesus teaches that the Kingdom of God is broader than our human categories, wider than our limited understanding of community. The work of God is not confined to a select few but is open to all who do good in His name.
- Jesus goes further to remind us about the seriousness of our actions: if something in our life causes us or others to sin or stumble, we must be willing to remove it.
- Sin creates walls between us and others, and between us and God. Jesus is inviting us to a radical form of reconciliation — to remove whatever separates us from true unity with God and one another.

Both readings challenge us to move away from attitudes of exclusion, fear, and control. We are called to build bridges — to see the goodness in others and to celebrate God's work, even in places or people we may not expect.

- The word **Catholic** means "universal," suggesting that our faith is meant to be inclusive, embracing all people regardless of background, culture, or status. However, we can also create walls within our faith communities that prevent others from fully participating in the life of the Church. Let's explore how these walls can form, and how we can work to build bridges instead.

1. Cultural and Racial Barriers:

- Sometimes, in our Catholic communities, we may unconsciously build walls based on cultural or racial differences. Parishes might be divided along ethnic lines, with little interaction or understanding between groups.
- Liturgical celebrations based on ethnicity and language (Ex:) are meant to enrich diversity within the Church, but should be done with caution so as not to create a ghetto and a sense of exclusion for those who don't belong to the same culture. —

- **Building Bridges:** promote multicultural celebrations, being open to different expressions of faith, and ensuring that everyone, regardless of their background, feels welcomed.

2. Religious Elitism & Doctrinal Rigidity:

- There can be a temptation within the Church to act as though some members are more “Catholic” than others based on how strictly they follow certain traditions or teachings. More often, the poor and marginalized, the mentally challenged, the addicts, the handicapped are being set aside.
- walls created between "traditionalists" and "progressives," the pro-Pope and the anti-Pope, each group dismissing the other as being either too rigid or too liberal (deviating already from the official doctrines). This division has created big havoc in our Church till today.
- **Building Bridges** mean Opening wide the doors of the Church to all who seek Christ includes those struggling with doubts, those on the margins, and those who may not fit neatly into our idea of what a “perfect” Catholic looks like. As Pope Francis often reminds us, the Church is a "field hospital," a place where people come to heal and find love, not judgment. We should be helping others to encounter God, not placing obstacles in their way.

3. Moral and Ethical Judgments:

- There can be a tendency to build walls between “sinners” and “saints” within the Church, excluding those who may not live up to Catholic moral teachings, such as people struggling with their sexual identity, marital status, or personal choices. We may become judgmental or dismissive of those who do not meet the ideal moral standards. –
- **Building Bridges:** Jesus Himself spent time with sinners, not to condemn them but to offer them love and an invitation to transformation. As Catholics, we must adopt a pastoral approach that welcomes people where they are, walking with them on their journey toward holiness rather than casting them out. Building bridges means creating spaces where people can encounter God’s mercy and feel supported in their struggles, rather than being pushed away.

4. Resistance to Ecumenism and Interfaith Dialogue:

- Some Catholics may view members of other Christian denominations or other faith traditions with suspicion or even hostility... seeing them as outsiders rather than fellow seekers of truth and goodness. –
- **Building Bridges:** The Church teaches that we must engage in respectful ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. It means working together for the common good, building unity while also honoring the uniqueness of the Catholic faith. In this way, we can witness to the love of Christ and the universality of God’s grace.

4. Clericalism and the Divide Between Laity and Clergy:

- Clericalism creates a division between the clergy and the laity, as though the work of the Church is the sole responsibility of priests and religious. This wall can lead to passive lay participation and a sense of hierarchy that separates rather than unites.
- **Building Bridges:** The Second Vatican Council emphasized the importance of the laity in the life of the Church, recognizing that all baptized members of the Church are called to participate fully in its mission. Building bridges here means empowering laypeople to take active roles in ministry, leadership, and evangelization, fostering a true sense of collaboration between clergy and laity.

As a final note, our common belief in God is enough reason to unite us and to respect each other. Faith must never be a reason for discrimination. Faith bridges gaps and never creates walls.