



Friendly Competition

2nd Thursday of Lent

Mark 9:38-41

John said to him, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.' But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.'

Of course, they tried to stop him. He was outside the circle. He did not belong to them. Who really knew what he was saying or what he was doing? Who did this man think he was, anyway? He was apparently one who had been touched by the teaching and the power of Jesus. He apparently was one who had followed, watched, and listened to Jesus, and now in ways that reach beyond our full understanding ("casting out demons") he was seeking to do what he believed Jesus called him to do.

The problem was not that the man wasn't following Jesus. The problem was that this man wasn't following the Twelve, in other words the established leadership of the church. How do you deal with one such as that? If he will not submit to the authority of the church's leadership, what do you do? Compete with him? Denounce him? Cooperate with him? Ignore him? This was a difficult issue for the early church and has been, as well, for ecclesiastical leadership throughout the centuries.

Jesus tells the Twelve to leave him alone because, in the first place, "whoever is not against us is for us," and in the second because God blesses such deeds of compassion. These are still useful words for us today. Regardless of the label they may claim for themselves or we may place upon them—conservative or liberal, mainstream or community, Protestant or Catholic—they are doing the work of Jesus (as are we) when, in his name, they reach out in deeds of compassion and kindness.