

26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, 26 September 2021

Scriptures: Numbers 11:25-29; James 5:1-6; Mark 9:38-48

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the first reading from the Old Testament Book of Numbers, we learned how Joshua's misplaced zeal manifests itself in the jealousy of others who act as prophets on their own. Moses, however, says that he wishes all God's people could be prophets.

In the second reading from the New Testament Letter of James, the criticism here is against those who are focused only on themselves and all their material possessions.

Then, from Mark's Gospel we learn that there is no room for jealousy in discipleship. Those who follow Jesus faithfully are called to recognize and to celebrate the different gifts that God has given to others.

These three readings give each of us here a great deal to reflect upon.

In years past, I have celebrated the Mass for the start of the new school year at San Domenico School. When I did that a few years ago, on that day there were 670 students, with all the additional teachers and school staff. Their school choir had about thirty students, together with students playing different musical instruments. The theme of the Mass was unity and diversity, and the recognition and celebration of all the gifts that God has given us. The same theme as today's Gospel.

During my homily, I went around asking the students to name some of the gifts that God gives us. They raised their hands, and I went to each student with my microphone, so they could name a gift. Some named musical talents, others named multilingual capabilities, others named kindness or simply the gift of empathy.

Finally, one student stood up and said: "God's gift to all of us is our beloved home, the Earth".

During the past few years, and especially since the promulgation in 2015 of Pope Francis' climate change encyclical *Laudato Si'*, students in both Catholic and public schools have become evermore conscious of our common responsibility to protect and preserve our home, the Earth.

In fact, high school and university students alike are not only well informed about climate change, but they have now become quite disturbed about it. A recent international scientific study concluded that young people today are experiencing "high levels of psychological distress" from climate change and governmental inaction on the growing crisis.

In a soon-to-be-published first ever large scale study of climate anxiety among young people, almost half--45%--of 10,000 multi-national students surveyed said that anxiety and stress about climate change is affecting their daily lives and functioning. Additionally, the research found that 75% of young people believe that "the future is frightening", and that 65% of them believe that their respective governments, including the United States, are not doing nearly enough to combat catastrophes that will be exacerbated by climate change.

Those very catastrophes were identified by Pope Francis both in his address to the United Nations in New York, and in his address to the United States Congress in Washington, D.C., six years ago.

Pope Francis challenged us and challenged the world on the critical issues of immigration, poverty, and climate change.

More specifically, if you were to ask how one might most accurately summarize the concerns of Pope Francis, it would be this, in just two words: family and home.

Family includes the specific issues of homelessness, unemployment, the plight of refugees, economic inequality, education, religious freedom, and...just making a space to dream.

Home includes the issues effecting our Earth, the very home given to us by our God. This includes such diverse but related concerns as allocation of resources, energy, sustainability, agriculture, pollution, and most importantly, climate change.

Pope Francis has prophetically placed these challenges before the world's leaders, and before each and every one of us.

When we look at the plight of the poor—here and throughout the world—all the more are we chastised by today's scripture readings.

When faced with devastating crises, what Jesus is calling us to do is to take the hand of the needy, one by one: to offer food and drink; to offer clothes and medicine; to offer a blanket and a bed; to offer a roof and a rosary.

What Jesus is calling us to do is what we at St. Rita's parish have been doing for years and years: to care for those in need, here and abroad.

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