

We have an odd kind of gospel today. It starts out with a rather inclusive message of inviting the outsiders to come in, but it ends with somewhat of an exclusive message: Cut it off or be locked out!

John, the insider, complains to Jesus about this successful exorcist – the outsider – who expels demons in the name of Jesus. John is saying, “We need to stop him, we need to cut him off.”

So, what is John’s motive in doing this? We might recall last week where Jesus speaks of suffering and dying while his apostles are maneuvering about who is the greatest. He admonishes them that the first are to be last and the last being first. Unfortunately, it falls on deaf ears.

In a few chapters beyond today’s gospel, we will find John asking whether his brother James and he may sit in glory at his right and left side, all the while Jesus speaks to them that he must suffer and die. Sometimes this actually continues to this day, with all the maneuvering in major liturgies that involve a bishop. Who will sit where?

We do not need nor want a priest that maneuvers for power, seeking the glory without the cross. John wants to limit the circle of intimacy around Jesus. He is not concerned about Jesus; it is about power and wanting no one to get in the way

Then we hear Jesus: Whoever is not against us is for us. In other words, “Let him sit next to me. Sorry John!” It is then that Jesus starts in about cutting body parts that might lead one to sin.

John does not understand at the time what he meant, because as I mentioned he will later maneuver about the sitting situation. It was only at the crucifixion of Jesus that he would finally get it that true greatness comes in sacrifice and service for one another.

To sit at his right and left John will realize it involves great suffering and dying to oneself. John would in time realize that when Jesus spoke of cutting one away, he may have actually been referring to John and the others who sought glory without the cross.

Jesus was insinuating that for the health of the body, the Church, it might be suitable for John, the one who would aspired to be Jesus’ right hand, to be cut off.

In the lectionary workbook the author hearkens to Paul, who also used the image of the eye, hand, and foot in his condemnation of competition among the members of the body (1 Cor 12:14-21). “The body is not a single part, but many.”

Jesus first speaks about the hand, foot, and eye, with a similar purpose. If one of the members of the body causes the rest of the body to derail, then for the sake of the health of the whole body, the infected member ought to be amputated.

The author adds, “To the degree that one member of the body – hand, foot, eye separates his or her function from the rest of the body, it disables the body. No single member can presume to get along without others.” The pastor is helpless without his “body.”

And that is the message to John, that he was tempting Jesus, away from his destiny, just as Jesus accused Peter of being Satan, when he tempted Jesus away from the cross and suffering.

The same is true today of this Body of Christ, as there were those insiders, through their devious sins, derail the Body of Christ. This is never more obvious in the scandals that took place in the past and continues to injure the Body of Christ and must be cut out.

I saw in the newspaper the pope is beginning to understand Jesus' message: "Whoever causes one of these little ones to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea."

The pope defrocked a priest, put a millstone around his neck and cast him from the priesthood – otherwise the Body of Christ is severely damaged by their continuing presence. More cutting to come as the light shines and exposes the darkness.

All of us in one shape or another, can act in our small ways, to be a hindrance to the Body of Christ. We all must be honest and say there are areas of our lives that can contribute to this and need to be cut out. I will be the first to say this is true of myself, as I must acknowledge that I can always be a better priest for you.

James warns about the selfishness of one's wealth can harm the mission of the Church to help those in need. I understand people might withhold for other reasons, but in so doing it is the local church that also ends up being punished.

Some want to leave by what has transpired in the past within the Church. Why walk away from the one's who sit next you every weekend? Who gets hurt without your presence or support? The Body of Christ suffers.

Moses dreams of the day when all the people will become a people of prophets. Well, that did happen on the day of Pentecost and onwards to through every generation.

The priesthood of Jesus would bestow that spirit through baptism and anoints all people as priests, prophets, and kings!

All have a responsibility to live up to that spirit that God has bestowed upon us! God bestows the spirit upon all of us and each one of us is responsible for that spirit in one shape or another.

This is not just the Bishop's church, nor monsignor' church, it is also your Church! You are the Body of Christ. Let that shine through you to help us see the Body of Christ through this dark period. "The body is not a single part, but many."

Who needs a millstone around their neck? If our hand, or foot or eye does not help us to bring about the kingdom then we fail to give good example of what we believe. Others suffer because of our lack of care and concern.

Our eyes are to be open to the needs of those around us, especially those in our families who may be in trouble and are hurting. Our hands are to be extended in loving service for one another. Our feet are to walk in the ways of the Lord bringing about unity, peace and love knowing Jesus as the way, the truth and the life.