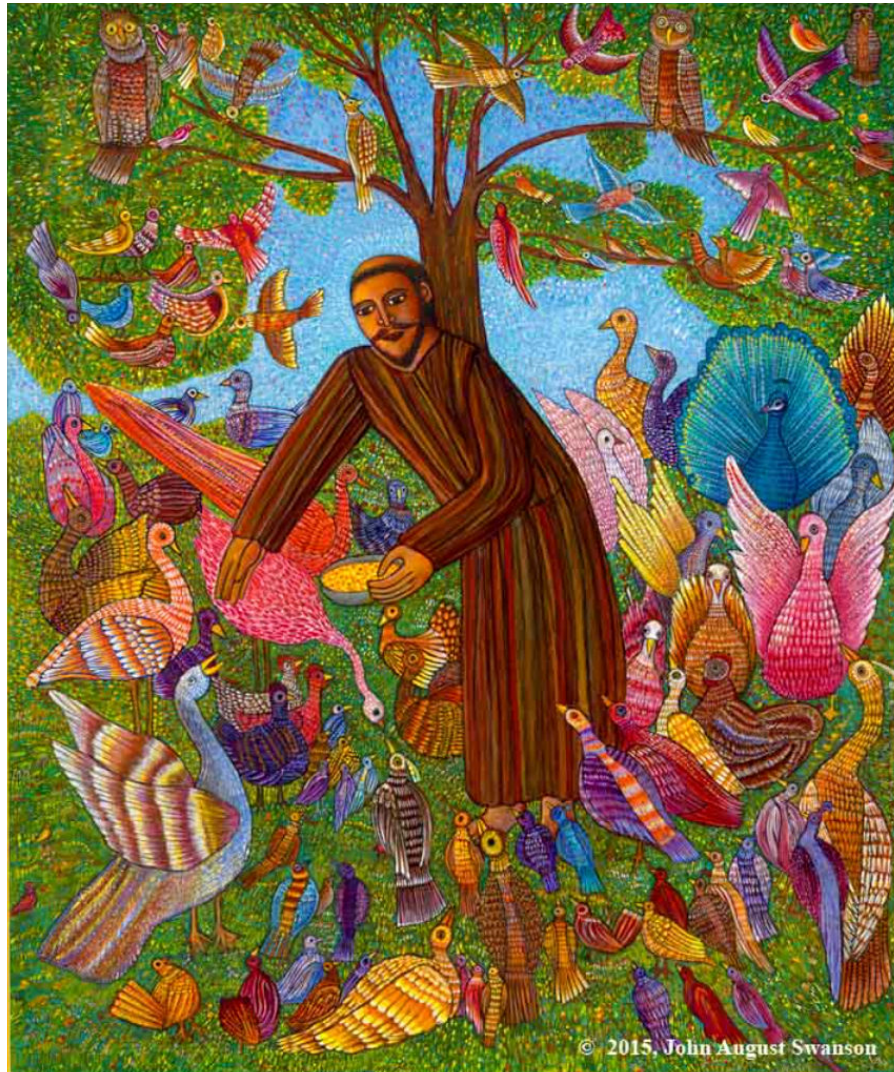


the Sunday Readings



26th Sunday Ordinary Time
5th Sunday of Season of Creation

26th Sunday Ordinary Time

Season of Creation / Week 5

*all must be prophets*¹

Introduction

In today's gospel passage Jesus gives a guideline for discernment: *"Whoever is not against us, is for us"*.² This broad criterion for acceptance to discipleship, challenges Jesus' closest accomplices (and us) of any tendency to feel that they (and we) exclusively own the message of Jesus. Mark is the evangelist who reminds us most often of how difficult it was for the apostles to believe in Jesus and to accept the demands he made on them. Mark says they didn't understand what Jesus was saying.³ The readings for this the fifth Sunday of the Season of Creation warn that our *'sinfulness'* is destroying our communities, the human family and Earth; the supportive and nurturing home of us all! We are challenged to be active and prophetic in working for the New Creation.

first reading: **Numbers 11 : 25 – 29**⁴

[the seventy elders; and Eldad and Medad]

Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again.(25) Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. (26) And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."(27) And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "My lord Moses, stop them!"(28) But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!"(29)

The story of Eldad and Medad suggests that the power for life-giving can be exercised apart from the easily recognised and publicly legitimated channels of religious authority. The Israelites complain about the tastelessness of life under Moses' leadership. And Moses admits his inability to bear the burdens of leadership alone.⁵ The Lord God bestowed some of the Spirit that was on Moses, on 70 elders, who immediately began to prophesy. Two other elders who were not present at this gathering, also received the Spirit and began to prophesy. Joshua was upset and wanted to stop them, but Moses was clear: *"Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!"*(v.29).⁶

1 Cover Image: of St Francis of Assisi preaching to the birds – by John Augustus Swanson 2015. The feast of St Francis this year, Friday the 4th October, marks the completion of the 2024 Season of Creation and heralds the beginning of the second session of the meeting in Rome on the topic of Synodality.

2 Mk.9:40

3 Their concern was what would their position be in the changes that Jesus was promising. Each sought their own advantage.

4 The biblical excerpts are drawn from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), published by Oxford University Press (1994).

5 Cf. Nm.11:3-4 &10-16

The Lord's choice isn't a personal privilege to be jealously guarded. Moses' prophetic leadership had represented a radical break with the oppressive empire of the Pharaoh. The dismantling of the empire's power began with voicing Israelite grief and rejecting Egyptian 'gods' who would not listen and could not answer. The result was the risky freedom of the free God. Without prophetic leaders such as Moses, people would settle for tastier meals and the security of regular slave-work. The complainers threaten this free alternative community.

Such threats are removed by a fresh assurance that the power for life-giving can be exercised in new and unexpected ways. Today's prayer for all of God's people to be prophets, provides the context for asking ourselves how the Laudato Si' Action Plan Partners in our communities can respond more fully to this commitment to be prophetic.⁷

response: Psalm 19 : 7, 9, 11 – 13 ⁸

[God's glory in the law]

*The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple;(7) . . .
the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.(9) . . .
Moreover by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.(11)
But who can detect their errors?
Clear me from hidden faults.(12)
Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
do not let them have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.(13)*

The Psalmist speaks a prayer for the wisdom and guidance of the Lord; a prayer to cleanse us even from our unknown faults. The speaker affirms the link between Torah-keeping and the existence of order. Managers always think about order. The speaker thinks about *the Law (the Torah of Moses)*. Managers tend to think that Torah doesn't matter. Torah is especially about giving of power to the powerless. Honouring Torah respects that creation is the Lord's and not ours – that creation is not at our disposal. While demands are placed on us, no matter what our power, the speaker states that we are not free to do what we want (v.25).

In the Psalm the heavenly elements of the world, now beautifully arranged, speak of the power and wisdom of their Creator (vv.2-7). The creator's wisdom is available to human beings in the Law (vv.8-11). The psalmist prays for discernment

6 Biblical prophets are inspired to speak GOD'S WORD to the people of their time. Given the urgency and seriousness of the planetary crisis and the threats to Earth confronting us, Moses' response needs to be ours. May GOD bestow the Spirit on everyone, raising people up around the planet as prophets.

7 The Laudato Si' Action Platform encourages a universal prophetic response throughout the Catholic community. During the Laudato Si' Special Anniversary Year, a programme was launched with public commitments from the various institutions that constitute the Catholic Community globally on a "a 7-year journey to total sustainability in the spirit of Laudato Si'." And they invite all like institutions to join them.

8 In the Psalm the heavenly elements of the world, now beautifully arranged, speak of the power and wisdom of their Creator (vv.2-7). The Creator's wisdom is available to human beings in the law (vv.8-11), toward which the psalmist prays to be open (vv.12-14).

and openness to those elements (vv.12-14). Since the Exodus, the Israelites had known that the purpose of the Lord is the empowerment of the powerless. That is what the speaker must say to the agents of order. Things must not be in the future as they now are. *The agent of order (the ruler)* is focused on how things are at the present time. *The agent of vision (the prophetic speaker)* addresses how things are going to be!

The speaker discerns the new is to be brought about by the Lord God. *The agent of vision* must insist to *the agent of order* that newness means change is coming and things as they are, are going to cease to be. And the change from what is to what will be, concerns the powerless. The new thing the Lord is doing, is empowering them to full humanness. In a perverted community the power questions are not faced honestly and kings don't listen. These agents of order tend to silence the prophets and abuse the powerless, who become slaves. We live in perverted communities, but like the Psalmist we are to insist that Torah-keeping can come in our community; managers can listen; agents of vision can speak; and the powerless can be honoured.

second reading: James 5 : 1 – 6

[a warning to rich oppressors]

Come now, you rich, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you.(1) Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten.(2) Your gold and silver have rusted and their rust will be evidence against you and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days.(3) Listen! The wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; And the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. (4) You have lived on the Earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.(5) You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.(6)

Continuing with the theme of the transitory character of life on Earth, the author points out the impending ruin of the godless. He denounces the unjust rich, whose victims '*cry to heaven for judgment on their exploiters*' (vv.4-6). The decay and corrosion of the costly garments and metals, which symbolise wealth, prove them worthless and portend the destruction of their owners (vv.2-3).⁹ The writer affirms that a society can only be correctly understood from the perspective of its victims. The needs of the poor have priority over the wants of the rich. The rights of workers are more important than maximizing profits. The participation of the marginalised ones is more important than preserving a system which excludes them.

The idea of divine judgement (v.4b) is the key to the warning against the rich. Miseries are coming upon them. The treasures that the rich have amassed as insurance against the judgement of the last day, are now in a state of decay. The rich are accused of holding back the wages of their employees, while they have lived in luxury and been responsible for the death of the righteous. The author is calling for justice. We are reminded of the last judgement in which

⁹ Although the rich who are denounced here were most likely not members of the Christian community, but outsiders, the early Christians feared the oppression and injustice that could flow from material wealth within the community.

the sins of the rich will be made clear and their wealth will not be of any use to them.

The reading from James reflects the judgment, widespread through the early centuries of Christianity, that those who have more than they need are in effect stealing from those who don't have the basics they need.¹⁰ The widespread culture and systems of competitive consumption and accumulation have consolidated global wealth, creating what Pope Francis has called, "*throw-away societies*".¹¹ Wealthy nations and wealthy communities and individuals have an urgent responsibility to address the crises their ways of living have created for the world community. These times demand human solidarity and a working together that is totally unprecedented in human history up until now.

gospel reading: Mark 9 : 38 – 43, 45, 47 – 48 [a grim warning about how seriously we need to take our sins]

John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."(38) But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. (39) Whoever is not against us is for us.(40) 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.(41) "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.(42) If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed, than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.(43) And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. (45) . . . And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of GOD with one eye, than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell,(47) where their worm never dies and the fire is never quenched.(48)

John plays the same role as Joshua did in Moses' time. John tells Jesus that he and the others tried to stop someone who didn't follow Jesus, from driving out demons in *his* (Jesus' name). Like Moses, Jesus rejects exclusive ownership to good works. He urges his disciples to respect those doing these works; "*Anyone who is not against us, is for us*".¹² Many non-Christians, or people who don't call themselves Christians, do great work. We could say they work '*miracles*! Jesus says anyone that works for the cause of others; the essence of his own practice; or

10 In this age of unprecedented inequality between the 1% with unimaginable wealth and the vast majority of the human family, James' words are a sharply appropriate prophetic warning. Today, it is clear that this warning applies not just to wealthy individuals or groups but also to the wealthy industrialised nations. Their development through fossil-fuel-driven production has over the last century and a half polluted and warmed Earth dangerously.

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12 This message is important to remember as members of the Catholic community we are to collaborate with and form networks with people of other faiths or no faith who do not share all the Church's beliefs or moral positions. In working to restore Earth and save all its inhabitants from devastating suffering and destruction, our position needs to be, in the words Jesus used, that whoever isn't against us is for us. And our prayer needs to be, "*Would that everyone were a prophet!*"

'*in his name*', is on the side of his followers. Such people can be with us, because our cause is the cause of human liberation.

The man is curing '*in Jesus' name*', because he was simply doing what Jesus was doing. Jesus said that people who drive out '*the devil*', or '*evil*', are on his side and the side of his community of disciples. The action of sharing a cup of water (v.41) is messianic. Its the same as welcoming servants/slaves; '*the little ones*', the powerless. Jesus doesn't divide people into believers and atheists. Those who show hospitality to the needy, understand the meaning of God's realm. Such actions subvert systems based on the exploitation of the weak by the powerful. Blessings are involved. Jesus is there. God is there. It is *a Real Presence!*

Jesus gives a grim warning about how seriously we need to take our sins and what terrible punishment will lie ahead for teaching the young our sinful ways. In the context of the Season of Creation, those sins include the destructive patterns of living identified by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* and throughout these commentaries for the Season of Creation and from so many other contemporary prophets.¹³

Jesus's warning demands we look at how we are raising our children and how they are learning to relate to Earth. Jesus's repeated reference to the horror of the fiery abyss, the unquenchable fire of Gehenna draws upon the imagery of Jewish apocalyptic. And his injunction to cut out of our lives what causes us to sin is vivid and effective use of Jewish hyperbole. Earlier when Jesus had been speaking about children,¹⁴ He meant "*all the weak and oppressed*". Here he clearly refers to the oppressed when he shifts from '*children*' to '*little ones*' (v.42). An obstacle placed on our path makes us fall over. '*Obstacle*' in Latin is, '*scandalum*', but that isn't what we mean now by '*scandalise*'. Jesus isn't talking about people who make others fall into sin. He is talking about people who make '*the little ones*' stumble. He says we have to be extreme if anything of ours is such an obstacle. We ought to take radical measures to eradicate anything that keeps us from belonging to God's reigning; even if it is something that is part of our own person (vv.43-47).

Disciples are supposed to '*flavour life*' in the world by their practise of the messianic values. Persecution purifies their practise. The salt of a disciple's witness loses it's taste when they betray the community. Then the community will not be blessed and at peace (v.50). Even in time of persecution, people must remain true to the practise of welcoming '*the little ones*' to their tables and sharing bread with them. The alternative, according to the gospel, is everlasting uncleanness. Salt and all the other things of Earth can be used for good or evil; as a blessing or a

13 The imagery of '*unquenchable fire*' or '*Gehenna*' (v.48) is eerily contemporary when we see videos of the massive wildfires destroying everything and everyone in their paths in Australia, western United States, Siberia and the Arctic, Indonesia, and the Amazon Rainforest in Brazil. Until the human family can embrace what Pope Francis calls '*an integral ecological conversion*', until we can cut out of our lives the sinful, destructive patterns of living on Earth that are driving climate change, we will continue more and more to face the fiery abyss, the unquenchable flames that are the contemporary incarnation of Gehenna.

14 Cf. Mk.9:35-37

curse. *'Have salt'* means to *'have love'* – sharing among everyone so we will all be equal; so we will live united and in peace.

for sharing: ¹⁵

- *The seventy elders; and Eldad and Medad.* **Comment on Numbers 11 : 25 – 29**
- *A warning to rich oppressors.* **Comment on James 5 : 1 – 6**
- *A grim warning about how seriously we need to take our sins.* **Comment on Mark 9 : 38 – 43, 45, 47 – 48**

prayer: ¹⁶

*Gracious, Holy God of all, we bless You.
In Your goodness and infinite generosity,
You poured Yourself out into Creation,
from the first flaring forth
of matter and energy to this very day.
Through the slow unfolding over billions of years,
You have brought forth a richly diverse,
powerful, and nurturing home
for all that You have created.
Open our eyes in awe
at the wonder of the Universe.
Turn our hearts to gratitude
for Your ongoing work of Creation.
And awaken our hope for the dream
of a renewed Creation where Your justice and love
will govern all
and all will live in Your peace.
We ask this in the name of Jesus: Amen.*

review: ¹⁷

In the passage from Numbers, outsiders prophesy. In the Gospel a strange exorcist drives out demons in Jesus' name. We don't always find that it is easy to assimilate new and unexpected developments, when we belong to an institution as

¹⁵ Lectio Divina: There are four steps in the traditional practise of *lectio divina*. The steps don't have to have the following order: lectio (reading) – read the passage of Scripture read slowly – more than once. If a particular word, phrase, or sentence seems significant (even if you don't know why) you may want to write it down. meditatio (reflection) – let the significant words fill your mind without straining to analyse them. We are in God's presence and so let the Holy Spirit lead your understanding of the words. oratio (prayer) – allow your heart to speak to God, in words inspired by the passage of Scripture, or by the thoughts that have come to you, while reflecting on it. contemplatio (rest) – let go of ideas and words and allow yourself to rest in the presence of God, in simple and wordless contemplation. This leaflet gives the context and some commentary on each of the readings and the psalm used in the Sunday liturgy. Whatever our preparation for doing this exercise and whatever questions we may use to break open the passage, we must be conscious of Christ's promise: *'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them'*.

¹⁶ The prayer that concludes the Lectio Divina is from 3rd Sunday of the Season of Creation a home for all? Renewing the Oikos of GOD, Season of Creation 2021 – a Catholic Liturgical Guide by James E. Hug, S.J. et al.

old as the Catholic Church. The readings warn us against condemning new developments too quickly.

We believe in God: who nearly 4.5 billion years ago began to form Earth; who patiently evolved Earth as a nurturing home for all creatures, all members of the Earth family. We believe in God who opens the ears and frees the tongues of those called to be prophets, guiding us to integral conversion, to nurture the New Creation among us.

We believe in Jesus, God become flesh of our flesh, a human part of the Earth community: who lived and breathed and spoke prophetic truth among us, sending us to be prophets of his Word for the healing of the Earth community. We believe in Jesus, who was rejected, tortured, and put to death on a cross, a faithful witness to God's call to loving care for all human beings and healing restoration for all creation. We believe in Jesus, the risen Christ, who is at the heart of the New Creation, guiding us in our conversion and reconciling all things to God, renewing creation.

We believe in the Holy Spirit working now among us, to deepen in all peoples, a spirit of solidarity dedicated to service of all for the renewal of Earth as a nurturing home for all. We believe that with Christ and in the Holy Spirit, we will rise to celebrate the New Creation. This is our faith. Through it we see God's revelation emerging in new ways among us. Through it we embrace the promise of God's saving love and our mission to restore the household of Creation.

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