

## 26 September 2021 - Gospel Reflection

Good morning/afternoon, St. Therese Family...

God is good ... all the time & all the time ... God is good

It's good to be with you - both physically and virtually - today as we enter deeper into Ordinary Time and are both challenged and invited to listen to God's Word and live it out in our own time at this unique historical moment.

Now in my eighth year as principal here at our beloved St. Therese Catholic Academy, I still have been unable to get away from the set of readings that we come across today. Every year I am invited to break open God's Word and ask for your support for our Annual Fund, and for the third time now I am asked to do so in conjunction with a Gospel that invites us to cut off our hands and feet and pluck out our eyes if they cause us to sin. If that's not motivation enough - especially when combined with St. James' condemnation of his own community for their lack of justice and generosity - I'll try to offer a bit more spiritual nourishment today to help us grow in God's love and generosity.

St. Paul tells us that God loves a cheerful giver, but we also have today's texts for those times in our lives when we are less inclined to detach from our things and leave our comfort zones. Christianity is NOT a spectator sport, it is not intended to be an easy and comfortable journey when we decide to follow Jesus. Rather, it is a lifestyle that calls us to act with justice and to celebrate and support when others do the same.

In both Mark's Gospel and the scene from Numbers that we heard about today, the setting is similar. God's work is happening - prophesying among the elders of Israel and driving out of demons in Jesus' name. However, members of Moses' and Jesus' inner circles were not okay with outsiders doing good in God's name. Joshua, the future leader of the Israelites, begs his mentor, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" For the educators among us, it probably sounded like the never ending complaint about cutting in line or a scene in a classroom where you ask one child to pick up a piece of trash on the floor but another child beats them to it - the good deed is done, but big emotions can fly.

Similarly, John, one of the 12 Apostles, goes so far as trying to stop someone from driving out demons in Jesus' name because "he does not follow us." Jesus quickly puts him in his place:

*Whoever is not against us is for us.*

I can imagine the look on John's face - rendered speechless but Jesus radical message of community, inclusion, and hospitality. Now that it's football season, we might consider the fact that Jesus' inner circle called themselves "The 12s" - sound familiar? There was an inherent bond among these Apostles with Jesus, but Jesus makes it clear - other people matter, are with us, and can do God's work just as well. It is not about you as an individual follower of me - it is about the mission. It is about the work. With exasperation, Jesus echoes Moses' sentiment with Joshua, "Oh if only all of the people were prophets!"

Gospel artist Bishop Noel Jones & the City of Refuge Sanctuary Choir say it like this - "It's not about us, but it's about Jesus. It's not about you, but it's about Jesus."

In my own life, our society, and our school, there are numerous examples of attitudes of exclusion being refuted by the beauty and power of radical inclusion.

When I was a younger adult and struggling mentally with a major life decision and avoiding the commitment to follow God's call for me, a close friend of mine suggested I consider going to counseling to get the help I needed. I shrugged at the idea and said that my prayer life could sustain me - I don't need a counselor's help. However, he didn't accept that - he challenged my attitude of exclusion by saying, "Who are you to deny the gifts that God has given others?" I signed up to meet a counselor that day and I would not be here before you today as a husband, father, or educator without that conversation. We at St. Therese are blessed to have a counselor here for our students - and an alum at that - to help our students process and navigate the complex world they're growing up in today. Feel free to check out the space after Mass today that Ms. Chappell uses to bring more peace into our students' days.

At the start of this school year, we had our work cut out for us in many ways, but especially when 180 brand new student desks arrived - boxed and unassembled. Our admin team began our work on a Monday afternoon, and after realizing how long it took us to assemble 1 or 2 each, we knew we were in for it. We humbly asked for help - and parents and colleagues showed up to not only assemble all the desks in less than a week, but also to remove all of the old ones, load them into a 24-foot U-Haul truck, and help spruce up our campus to be ready for the school year. Had we limited our work to our admin team - not wanting to disrupt anyone's summer - we'd still be building those desks a month and a half later. We had to embrace our humility, ask for help, and let God's gifts in others shine.

A few weeks later when the new benches and picnic tables arrived - we didn't even open the boxes - we asked for from those with the gifts to let their lights shine in that area, and 4 dads got them all done in less than a school day. When the circle was expanded and we embraced a spirit of inclusion, God's light shined more brightly.

Our theme at our school this year is: "We are the light of the world!" To fully live out this theme, all of our gifts are not just needed, but required to be put to use in service of God's Kingdom. Every morning when we begin our school day in community, we discuss our Saint of the day, say our prayers, and then unify our voices by singing, "Lift Evry Voice & Sing." Our use of a microphone magnifies students' voices, but we have one preschooler, Zuri, who does not need a mic. She sings every line as if its inauguration day and the whole world needs to hear us march on until victory is one. Fr. Woody was inspired by Zuri and her preschool classmates' gift of song so that when he went in to meet them for the first time - they sang him a song and he offered one right back - I believe a Chinese rendition of *Frere Jacques* - ask him about it after Mass - he's good! These little incarnational moments bring light to all who are present, just like when our buddy classes get together and inspire each other, when alumni come back to visit, volunteer, or work with us - which has all been happening in our first month of school.

Many parishioners have also been letting their lights shine in service to our school in ways visible and invisible for years. Dr. Sharon Dobie was a regular tutor pre-Covid, yet she has not stopped tutoring,

through summers and to this day she does a twice-weekly Zoom with a student she began with years ago. John Russell and the Laudato Si team markets their monthly work parties, but they and the garden team are here far more often, many times teaching our kids about the work they're doing and the sacredness of it at recess or after school. Bob Mackin and the Vincent dePaul Society are regular supporters of our families when they fall on hard times - this relationship has kept our families housed, fed, and happy. The shelter ministry has pivoted in the Covid-era, but this ministry invited students into the meal preparation and transportation to the Matt Talbot center that they've quietly committed to in recent months. In many ways, these are seeds that will continue to grow.

Finally, in a very tangible way, the Tiny House team that has been erecting a future home for a neighbor in need right outside has been visible and interacting with our students often. This past Tuesday, Jerry Stanton asked if he could do some insulation work inside the house while it wasn't too busy in the afternoon. I gave him the green light, totally forgetting the recess schedule. However, as Jerry humbly went about his work inside the house, he received a knock on the door. Startled, he opened the door to see a little girl outside. They greeted each other, and she asked him if he was building himself a house. He said, "I'm helping build a house, but not for me. It is for someone who doesn't have a house." The girl replied, "Oh, a homeless person. Thank you - thank you for doing that."

This small exchange epitomizes the best in us - when we do God's work, others notice. When others notice, they sometimes give us praise, but in taking notice, they witness God's love in action, and the call to join in the work - with their own gifts and talents - is magnified. You don't need to be a parishioner or student in our community, or even a Catholic to join in this work of being light to the world. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Everybody can be great, because anybody can serve."

As we seek to partner with parents to form the next generation of servant leaders for our diverse world, I humbly ask for your support - whether that is your time, talent, or treasure - to lift up our beloved school community. You have some metrics in the pews - and if you're with us virtually, we'll send this out to all parishioners via e-mail - and these numbers show that the work happening in our school is God's work, and our students are embracing that call for all God's people to be prophets. Today, families are coming from 44 zip codes to be a part of our school. We would not have expanded our enrollment, improved our academic outcomes, or made any of the strides we have in recent years without your support. Thus, we ask you once again to make a gift to help us make excellence happen on purpose - for the Lord loves a cheerful giver! I'll be available outside after Mass to discuss and share other Good News about our school - and to recruit volunteers to help us expand this vital ministry of our parish.

In closing, today's message on inclusion reminds me of the story in which a devout Catholic volunteered with Dorothy Day at a Catholic Worker soup kitchen in New York. The volunteer was moved by the experience, but also hesitant to continue. He said I see the good happening here, but it seems very few of the guests are Catholic. To this, Dorothy Day simply replied, "We don't do this because they're Catholic. We do this because we're Catholic." Amen.



## ***Why Support St. Therese Catholic Academy?***

Founded in 1927, we have been igniting the faith, minds & dreams of our students for 94 years...

Enrollment has *nearly doubled* from 2014 to the present (112 → 201), with retention rates above 90% annually

For 4 consecutive years, *100% of our 8th Grade graduates were accepted* into at least one Catholic high school

**89% of our students identify as children of color; 57% are non-Catholic; 64% receive tuition assistance; 32% qualify for free/reduced lunch**

Families come from **44 zip codes** to attend STCA - the *most diverse Catholic school* in the region

***Your donations celebrate our past, enhance our present, and sustain our future!***

### **Root Beliefs**

- 1. We are a diverse community.**
- 2. We are called to act with justice.**
- 3. “We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.”**
- 4. Excellence happens on purpose.**
- 5. We lead by example.**

### **Mission**

*St. Therese Catholic Academy is a diverse, welcoming community that seeks to ignite the faith, minds, and dreams of our students and to prepare them to excel spiritually, academically, and socially in high school, college, and beyond.*



### **Website**

[www.stcaseattle.org](http://www.stcaseattle.org)

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