

Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (year A)

Matthew 7:21-27

This gospel passage is the tail-end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' long discourse revealing the reality

- of discipleship
- of belonging to Him

It is an interesting, albeit somewhat puzzling, finale:

“Oh, by the way, not everyone is a disciple,
not everyone belongs to me.”

Jesus describes things that many persons presume

- are indicative of being a Christian
- manifest discipleship
 - prophesying *in the name of the Lord*
 - expelling demons *in the name of the Lord*
 - doing mighty deeds *in the name of the Lord*

That sounds pretty “Christian” to me!

If you were to see someone prophesying and expelling demons and doing mighty deeds
in the name of the Lord, what would you conclude?

Strong divine connection! Definite Christian!

And yet...

Jesus not only says that such things *per se* do not cut the heavenly mustard.

Jesus says to those who do them (as He describes), “Depart from me, you evildoers”!

Talk about a huge, blinding spotlight being cast.

What exactly is Jesus saying?

That prophesying and expelling demons and doing mighty deeds are, in fact, bad?

Of course not.

Jesus is saying, however, that these things can entirely miss the mark.

To grasp this,

- one need but revisit the Sermon on the Mount.
- one need but consider the only new commandment Jesus gives.
- one need but consider the words of Paul in I Corinthians 13

“If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love,

I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal.

**And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge;
if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing.”**

I recall a huge billboard in front of a mega-church in San Antonio, Texas by which I used to drive from time to time. It declared, "Where Miracles Happen!"
Hmmm: a church of power...

I also recall recent dialogue with an evangelical fellow from Austin, Texas. (what is it with Texas?!?).

I had sent him my sermon notes for Pentecost.

In response, he asked what I considered to be the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the church.

I simply enumerated the fruits of the Holy Spirit found in Galatians 5 (peace, joy, etc.).
Fruits are manifestations...

He responded,

"I think we should expect manifestations of Holy Spirit power *that go beyond love*".

Jesus, in this discourse, declares that there is nothing beyond love,

and that power is relative to love, that power is at the service of love.

This is already a human truth, for our purpose, humanly speaking, is to love.

Divinely speaking, it is infinitely more true, for "God *is* love."

God is not power. God is power-ful.

We speak of power in God regarding what He *does*, not who He *is*.

Power in God characterizes His actions insofar as they have an effect.

The cause of His actions, however, is His very Self,

He who is love (I John 4:16) and light (I John 1:5).

Every powerful thing that God *does* is so to communicate Himself who is love and light.

Understanding this is paramount, for it corrects our thinking,

we who are more readily impressed by power.

We like impact and effect. We like mighty deeds.

Understanding this is paramount, for it then clarifies what we should expect

- from God in our lives
- when we go to Church

Is God supposed to rock my world?

Or is God supposed to *love* my world?

Interestingly, in John 3:16, we read, "For God so *loved* the world

(not, For God so *rocked* the world), that He gave His only begotten Son."

We touched upon this last week in considering the gift of the Eucharist.

How many more people would come to church if, at the moment of consecration, sparks came forth from the Eucharistic bread, i.e. a *mighty* deed?

No sparks: only silence and simplicity.

Why? So that we understand that it is first about love, second about power.

It is love, not power, that binds us to God.

God comes to love us, *deeply*.
And love is deeply interior (which does not mean subjective).
Power is rather exterior.

God comes to work in the depths of our heart.
Sometimes He does a mighty deed, He rocks our world,

- *so to wake us*
- *so to grab our attention.*

Thus awakened and grabbed, we can open ourselves to being loved.
God's purpose is to love us,
and, in loving us, heal and transform us.

And so, we ought to come to church expecting to be loved,
not expecting emotional shock therapy.
Keep this in mind, for, in a heartbeat, we slip back into expecting to be rocked.
"Nothing happened at Mass today. It was so boring."
Again, we should work towards engaging liturgies, engaging celebrations.
But such "engagement" is not an end.

If we open our hearts,
If we come desirous of loving encounter,
it happens, for Jesus is faithful.
If we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, then *everything* happens.

I am reminded of the beautiful words of the Roman Catechism,
(a summary of the Christian faith from the 16th century):.

"The whole concern of doctrine and its teaching must be directed to the love that never ends. Whether something is proposed for belief, for hope or for action, the love of our Lord must always be made accessible, so that anyone can see that all Christian works spring from love and have no other objective than to arrive at love." (Preface, 10; cf. I Corinthians 13:8)

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to set us aflame with love.