

Tolerance

A gospel reflection from Brian Wigger, Pastoral Associate

This Sunday, Jesus teaches us about tolerance. Tolerance is often associated with being permissive. Being tolerant or permissive is suspect; it has to be checked if it could lead to abuse of freedom or to violent consequences. A parent, who is not able to correct their children's bad behavior early in life, is being tolerant in a wrong way. Tolerance could also be right in other cases. In fact, it would be a big mistake to view tolerance in its negative value only.

In the gospel, Jesus asks his disciples to be tolerant. If tolerance were not good, why would Jesus require such from his disciples? As narrated, it started when after the disciples 'saw someone driving out demons' in the name of Jesus, they prevented him from performing exorcism because he did not belong to the followers of Jesus.

We could only surmise what were in the minds of the disciples. Were they jealous because the man could also cast demons though he was not one of them? Were they angry because they have assumed that the power to exorcise demons was a privilege given only to the followers of Jesus and not to any other person? The disciples were confused. Suddenly, what they have thought to be their exclusive right was no longer their own alone.

Jesus had his reasons: 'Do not prevent him,' he said, 'there is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us.' With these words, Jesus has taught his disciples about tolerance more as an exercise of Christian humility and charity.

This teaching is so relevant for us today. We should not think that salvation is reserved only for us who were baptized and who believe in Christ. Membership to his Church, faith, and the sacraments are still considered the ordinary ways to receive salvation, but this does not exclude the possibility that God could offer other ways of bringing people to encounter the 'paschal mystery of Christ' in their lives. Like the outsider who performed exorcism in the name of Jesus, we have to understand that it is really Jesus who is the true source of salvation; the rest is just his medium.

Jesus calls us to religious tolerance, as long as it is not against him and his teachings. It is prudence perhaps that sometimes makes us doubt whether something or someone should be tolerated or not. However, Jesus challenges us towards religious tolerance so that individually we also learn to discern about the faith we have received: what is truly to follow Christ, how is it really to belong to him, what does it really mean to be a Catholic? In the answers our salvation is found.