

**Catholic Church of the Beatitudes  
Santa Barbara, CA**

The 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B – September 29, 2012

**Harriet Burke**

Reflections on **Num. 11:25-29; James 5:1-6; Mark 9:28-43, 45, 47, 48**

When I first moved to my home, I thought one of the most interesting aspects of the area was its diversity. In our short block there were first-generation German families, Danish, Taiwanese, and Japanese. It was wonderful for our family to be exposed to different cultures and ethnic practices.

One year, things got difficult though when one of the neighbors rented his garage to six Mexican men. These men were restaurant workers being paid less than minimum wage and living in an awful situation. They had no bathroom facilities: no place to urinate, wash or even brush their teeth.

We called a neighborhood meeting of the eleven families and invited the owner of the home. People shared their concerns about many things that were not right about the situation and then one woman, who herself was a *first generation* person, said, “Those Mexicans just do not belong here.”

She went way beyond the fact that the housing was cramped and inadequate. She meant that the color of their skin and their language was not like ours. The intolerance of her statement brought us all to silence and some of us to shame.

Each one of the readings today speaks in some way of intolerance, narrowness, or looking at an issue from just one point of view.

Let’s think about what we just heard in the readings. It was an exciting time in the story from the Book of Numbers; to have the same spirit that had been given to Moses shared with 70 more people. It sounds very Pentecost-like, doesn’t it?

Intolerance raises its ugly head when two interlopers, Eldad and Medad, who were not in the tent, were also gifted by God and able to prophesy to those around them in the camp. People thought these two renegades weren’t in the right place at the right time, so they must be imposters. Intolerance often comes into play when things don’t follow the divinely ordained pattern that we recognize or are comfortable with.

In the reading from James the wealthy are scolded for their intolerance toward the field workers. We hear they cheated them, and did not pay fair wages – it actually sounds as if they paid no wages of any kind.

The gospel story mirrors some of the same concerns as in the first reading. This man was claiming to cast out demons as a follower of Jesus, but no one knew him. Was he trying to replace Jesus? Fear sometimes takes over when we are in the mode of intolerance. In *his* fear, John, in the gospel story, could not recognize the charisms of the exorcist as valid or valuable.

When *we* look around us it seems easy to know when intolerance is going on. Look at all the political things happening right now. Certainly between now and Nov 6 we will hear many character assassinations of one candidate or another.

If we look at religion in the news it’s pretty hard not to think that the *hierarchy* of the church might have some intolerance issues concerning *women*. We all know the news of the interaction of the American Bishops and the Vatican with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, but in the same time frame

they also found unacceptable the writings of two revered and respected women: Sr. Elizabeth Johnson, the theologian, was censured for one of her books, *Quest for the Living God*, and Sr. Margaret Farley was attacked for attempting to suggest ethical guidelines and moral wisdom for our sexual lives, in her book *Just Love*. They both had the audacity to suggest new ways of thinking.

I think that the nuns, the LCWR, Elizabeth Johnson, and Margaret Farley are prophets. They are prayerful, bright, and they model for us the search for God in our midst. They are trying to turn things around by calling our church and the various systems in our culture to go beyond this deadly path of intolerance. It does not build up the *Body of Christ*.

At times when I talk with my children or other friends about what Christianity is today, they respond with words like “judgmental,” “narrow-minded,” “dogmatic”, or “condemning.” They are not being disrespectful—it’s their experience.

We’re better than that! We speak of and say we live as Eucharistic people. We believe in union with one another and with God. We are people who believe that we each have a bit of the divine in us, no matter how successful, plain, or simple we might be! When the LCWR suggested the solution of sitting at the table to have an open dialogue of equals, that gave me hope and I think it was a start.

But I don’t want to just talk about the larger picture in our lives of politics and church. Thursday morning and evening at a recent meeting of [Word and Life](#), Rev. Paul Smith spoke – he was amazing. One of the things he reminded us of was a quote from Teilhard de Chardin. “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings

having a human experience.” So, for each of us spiritual people on our human journey, it is important to ask ourselves when intolerance has been a part of our lives. We probably all know what it feels like not to be tolerated or being intolerant of another. We all know those times are not good for our hearts, minds, or souls, right?

Intolerance may come from an attitude we grew up with and never rethought, or it may come from an unpleasant interaction. Today’s readings ask us to at least look at them and assess where they came from and what kind of liability or character flaw they create in us.

The story I told at the beginning about the Mexican laborers happened a long time ago - but the feeling I experienced when those divisive words were spoken in my living room have never left me.

I’d like to suggest that this week, we take one intolerance that we have, and hold it, sit with it, and look at it squarely – be it about bigotry, homosexuality, religious groups, or something as simple as being irritated at an idiosyncrasy of a friend, and ask ourselves what we can do to open or expand our thinking about the impact of that one intolerance.

And as a follow up, I would suggest we take another bit of time to talk with someone about what we discovered about ourselves, asking them to help by encouraging and challenging us to move toward change of this intolerance.

This may seem like a small step, but I am convinced that when we let go of some of our intolerance, we will be different and those we interact with will be touched and perhaps look at things in a new way—and be more able to see the divine in themselves and all around them.