

No One is Entitled

Num. 11: 25-29; Ps. 19; Ja. 5: 1-6; Mk. 9: 38-43, 45, 47-48

Remember in high school the feeling of being included in the IN group? You felt so cool. The other students looked up to you and moved aside as your group walked through the hallways. Even the teachers looked your way when they wanted to launch something new with the students. They knew that, if they could convince you to go in a certain direction, most of the other students would follow.

You felt entitled to respect simply because you were in the IN group. Or, maybe you were not in the IN crowd and did not feel any sense of entitlement. Entitlement. It's a term that has been spoken about many times over recent years. A claim to something just by virtue of being who you are or of being in a select group.

This sense of entitlement is not new. We read about it in the Scripture passages for this Sunday. In the time of Moses, God relieved Moses of some of the burdens of prophesying when He conferred the spirit of prophesy on seventy of the elders of the Israelites. But two men, Eldad and Medad, were not at the meeting when the other seventy were given the gift and yet they also were anointed and began to prophesy. The other elders were horrified and Joshua asked Moses to stop Eldad and Medad saying that they were not entitled to prophesy because they were not given the spirit from God along with the other seventy elders.

Moses calmly told Joshua not to be jealous and that he should wish for everyone to be prophets of the Lord. Clearly, Moses did not believe that only those present when the Lord conferred the spirit on the seventy elders were entitled to prophesy. They were not an exclusive group.

This scene was re-enacted in the Gospel when Jesus' disciples saw someone, who was not one of them, invoking the name of Jesus to cast out demons. They tried to stop him but Jesus, like Moses before Him, told them to relax and to leave the man alone. He told them that, regardless of what group the man belonged to, if he was not against Jesus and His disciples then he was for them and that whoever did a good deed in the name of Jesus was following His commandment to love and would receive their reward. Like Moses, Jesus did not believe that only His disciples were entitled to cast out demons because of their close association with Him. Being disciples does not mean that we have joined an exclusive group.

Jesus does not play favourites. He was not trying to establish an IN group when he called His disciples. Anyone who performs deeds of kindness and compassion in His name are His disciples regardless of whether they are affiliated with one group or another; or with no group. Anyone and everyone belongs to Christ.

Being a baptized Catholic or Christian does not entitle us to exclusive rights to the Kingdom of God. Jesus said: 'When I am lifted up, I will draw everyone to myself.' (Jn. 12: 32). Jesus' reach extends far beyond the limits of the group of His followers to include everyone in creation. He told His disciples that everyone is trying to come to Him and that they must not put any barriers or 'stumbling blocks' in their path. No one is entitled to special treatment because of being a disciple of Jesus but everyone is entitled to an unobstructed path to come to Him according to their own understanding and tradition, and in their own time. We should be careful not to stand in their way.