

Today is the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time and the feast day of Saint Jerome, our patron saint, the theme that runs through the readings is that: **The Spirit of the Lord is not jealous nor selfish.** Unlike the first reading and the gospel in which we see human elements of selfishness and jealousy, the Spirit of the Lord is perfect. God promised to reduce the burden of Moses by appointing Seventy Elders as Moses' Helpers. Sixty-eight of the chosen helpers were present in the Tent of meeting, while two men who do not appear before the Tabernacle also receive the Spirit. Joshua, Moses' assistant took the prophesying of Eldad and Medad as a threat to Moses' leadership and told Moses to stop them. But Moses did not believe that at all, rather expressed a **wish for all the people to be prophets** and to be equipped by God's Spirit (Num.11:29).

There is a similar story in our gospel today. John told Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he is not in our company". Jesus' reply is filled with wisdom: "Don't stop him, because no one who does a mighty work in my name will soon be able to speak evil of me". In effect, Jesus is saying that if someone is performing miracles in his name then he is one of his disciples. Thus, **the disciples of Jesus Christ are not necessarily the Twelve Apostles** (Mk.9:39-40). All of us, through the grace of baptism, become disciples of Christ. Jesus reprimands his disciples for their jealousy and selfishness. Are we not like the disciples when we get upset at the good deeds of others who seem to be doing better than we are? Let us pray in this Mass for the grace of God to be poured into our hearts and to purify us to seek the highest good of our neighbors.

Today's readings also have a strong link with our patron saint, Saint Jerome, priest and Doctor of the Church. He was born at Strido in Dalmatia about the year 340. He studied in Rome, and became a lawyer. He converted and joined the Church in theory, and was baptized in 365, but it was only when he began his study of theology that he had a true conversion and the faith became integral to his life. He then began to lead a life of asceticism. St. Jerome went to the East, where he was then ordained priest at the age of 39. Returning to Rome, he became secretary to Pope Damasus, who tasked St. Jerome to translate the Bible into Latin as well as promoting the monastic life. After the death of Pope Damasus, some priests made life unbearable for St. Jerome, which caused him to leave Rome to return to desert solitude. However, some pious women, with which he had started Bible study with followed him to Bethlehem. He settled in Bethlehem and translated the whole Bible into Latin (Vulgate). He wrote many works, especially commentaries on the scriptures.

According to St. Jerome, 'always be doing something, so that whether God or the devil comes to you, you may be found with your hands full. Again, the reading of the Holy Scriptures should follow upon prayer, and prayer in turn should follow reading of the Holy Scriptures: 'for ignorance of the Scriptures is the ignorance of Christ.' St. Jerome used to conduct his controversies with **great fierceness**, but readily **acknowledged his shortcomings, to the very end, he submitted his body to severe fasting and vigils.** I think we can draw a lot of lessons from his life, especially acknowledging our sinfulness and trying to live penitential life for a better future and to also run always from evil company in order to please God.

Finally, dear friends, the readings tell us that all leaders should be careful about our councilors (Joshua and John), so that we can make an informed decisions guided by the Holy Spirit. Again, through our baptism all of us have become priests, kings and prophets and a lot is expected from us. In the today's reading, we see some human elements of selfishness, jealousy and wickedness that most of us are guilty of having. Indeed, all of us want to be saints like St. Jerome, if and only if we do away with our human weaknesses of selfishness, jealousy, anger... which St. Paul has warned us that those who do these things will not inherit the Kingdom of God, confer Gal.5:21. Let us work out our salvation with fear and trembling and heaven will be our portion. Amen!