

## 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

### Numbers 11:25-29

*The background for this reading is that Moses complained to God that the burden of leadership was too heavy in 11:10-15. Today's reading is God's solution! He commanded Moses to choose seventy elders to assist him in leading the people. When he had done so, the Lord came upon them, giving them a share in the spirit that God had bestowed on Moses. This gift of the spirit led them to break out in ecstatic prophecy.<sup>2</sup>*

**25**The Lord came down in the cloud The cloud reveals the presence of God while veiling the transcendence of his glory. **and spoke to Moses.** This suggests a momentous encounter between God and Moses! **Taking some of the spirit that was on Moses,** Cyril of Jerusalem, a Doctor of the Church who died in 387 A.D., wrote that the Spirit is the same in the Old and in the New Testaments. He went on to say that this passage is an image of “what was to come to pass among us on the day of Pentecost.”<sup>7</sup> **the Lord bestowed it** God himself is the source of the spirit and he can give it to whomever he chooses, irrespective of human qualifications.<sup>3</sup> **on the seventy elders;** This is a prefiguring of the ordained ministry of the New Covenant and the Church makes reference to this in her prayer at the ordination of priests.<sup>6</sup> (CCC1541-1542) **and as the spirit came to rest on them, they prophesied.** We cannot know that the Spirit has been poured in, unless it somehow pours out, usually in prophecy and tongues. In the New Testament it is interesting to note that in 1Cor. 14: 1 it says, “Seek eagerly after love. Set your hearts on spiritual gifts—ABOVE ALL, THE GIFT OF PROPHECY.” We understand that a prophet is one who communicates divine revelation. The prophet is called by God to speak for God. The usual messages either foretell something that is going to happen or, more commonly, they call people to holiness. It sometimes takes the form of a threat or a promise, a reproach (which expresses blame or disapproval) or an admonition or warning. The Old Testament prophets received their messages from God in visions, trances and dreams. Some refer to this as “speaking in enraptured enthusiasm.” Some modern writers like Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and others tell us that one must use imagery and symbolism to describe an immediate experience of God. Words are inadequate. They say that it is a transforming experience, which moves one to speech and action beyond one's expected capacities.<sup>4</sup>

**26**Now two men, one named Eldad and the other Medad, were not in the gathering but had been left in the camp. They too had been on the list, but had not gone out to the tent; yet the spirit came to rest on them also, and they prophesied in the camp. For some reason these two who had been chosen to be part of the seventy, had not gathered for the ceremony at the tent of meeting. Nevertheless, they also received the spirit and they too broke out in ecstatic prophecy back in the camp.<sup>2</sup>

**27**So, when a young man quickly told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp,”

**28**Joshua, son of Nun, who from his youth had been Moses' aide, In addition, he was a Lieutenant who guarded the tabernacle. He was also one of the men sent to scout Canaan before the entrance of the Israelites and with Caleb, gave the minority report that with the help of the Lord they could take over the land. That report enabled those two to be the only men of fighting age at that time, to enter the promised land. He then became Moses' successor.<sup>4</sup> **said, “Moses, my lord, stop them.”** This is a reminder that not all new and surprising things are to be mistrusted and stopped. Sometimes new messages, actions, and ideas are the life of God in us.<sup>1</sup> God's spirit cannot be limited.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>29</sup>But Moses answered him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets! Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit on them all!” The only way for the people to complete their journey to the promised land, (which is a symbol of heaven for us), is by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit! When the people are empowered and led by the Spirit, they are faithful to God and happy. Moses has the right attitude: he has no desire to monopolize the spirit or to be its only channel. He seeks only the people’s welfare and is delighted to see signs of the spirit in other people, indeed, he would like all the Israelites to have it!<sup>3</sup> This last line of v. 29 is a prayer of Moses and it was answered at Pentecost.<sup>5</sup>

### James 5:1-6

*This is our last reading from the letter of James. He uses very strong language in getting us to look at our values. In tones that remind us of the Prophets, James reproves the well-to-do for their pride, vanity and greed (vv 2-3) and their pleasure-seeking (v 5), warning them that the judgment of God is near at hand.*

<sup>1</sup>**Come now, you rich,** This is not just intended to influence the rich to whom it is rhetorically addressed, but is rather a warning to the faithful of the terrible fate of those who abuse riches and perhaps also a consolation to those now oppressed by the rich.<sup>8</sup> **weep and wail** This is a forceful call to repentance.<sup>9</sup> **over your impending miseries.** This refers to death and reminds them that a “shroud has no pockets” and “you can’t take it with you!”

<sup>2</sup>**Your wealth has rotted away, your clothes have become moth-eaten,** Greed, an inordinate desire for material things, is one of the seven deadly sins. An avaricious person offends against justice and charity and becomes insensitive to the needs of his neighbor. “If you are inclined to avarice,” says St. Francis de Sales, “think of its folly: it makes us slaves to that which was intended to serve us. Remember how we must leave everything when we die; perhaps those who get our wealth then will only squander it, and even to their ruin.” Our Lord also speaks about the moth and the rust which consume earthly treasures, and tells us that the true treasure is good works and upright actions, which will earn us an everlasting reward from God in heaven.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup>**your gold and silver have corroded,** Although silver and gold do not actually rust, this expression indicates their basic worthlessness.<sup>8</sup> **and that corrosion will be a testimony against you; it will devour your flesh like a fire.** The very objects of accumulated wealth are represented as instruments of punishment.<sup>8</sup> **You have stored up treasure for the last days.** A reference to the Day of Judgment.<sup>8</sup> Jesus tells us in Matt. 6:19-20 that we should store treasures in heaven where they will never lose their value and are safe from thieves.

<sup>4</sup>**Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers** There are “sins that cry to heaven” for immediate, exemplary punishment: murder, sodomy, the cry of the people oppressed in Egypt, the oppression of the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan, and INJUSTICE TO THE WAGE EARNER.<sup>6</sup> (CCC 1867) **who harvested your fields are crying aloud;** In Deuteronomy 24:14-15, it is clear that the laborer must be paid before sunset of the same day that he works. The occasional laborer was paid daily because he always lived on the very verge of starvation. His wage was small; it was impossible for him to save anything; and if the wage were withheld from him, even for a day, then literally he and his family would not eat. The abuse of nonpayment under some pretext is also condemned in the Prophets.<sup>10</sup> **And the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.** The OT expression first meant “Lord of the armies of Israel”; later, “of the heavenly armies,” i.e., the stars or even the angels. This description of God acknowledges his omnipotence as Creator

and Lord of the whole universe and is used to acclaim God in the Sanctus of the Mass: “Lord God of power and might.”<sup>9</sup>

**5**You have lived on earth in luxury and pleasure; you have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter. This phrase is taken from Jer 12:3 and it emphasizes the proximity of judgment. Their excessive indulgence makes the rich more vulnerable to coming torments.<sup>8</sup>

**6**You have condemned; you have murdered the righteous one; According to St. Bede, this refers to Jesus. This interpretation is appropriate given the fact that in the needy we should see Jesus Christ himself.<sup>9</sup> **he offers you no resistance.** This may come from Sirach 34:22, “To take away a neighbor’s living is to murder him; to deprive an employee of his wages is to shed blood.” “Every man has the right to possess a sufficient amount of the earth’s goods for himself and his family. This has been the opinion of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, who taught that men are bound to come to the aid of the poor and to do so not merely out of their superfluous goods.<sup>9</sup> Faced with a world today where so many people are suffering from want, the Council (“Gaudium et spes”) asks individuals and governments to remember the saying of the Fathers: “Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you do not feed him you are killing him!” and it urges them according to their ability to share and dispose of their goods to help others, above all by giving them aid which will enable them to help and develop themselves.”

### **Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48**

*According to Scott Hahn, 80% of what we know about hell comes from the teachings of Jesus Christ. This is more than what we know from all the other writers on the subject put together!*

**38**At that time, John This is the only time that John is singled out as a questioner in Mark.<sup>15</sup> **said to Jesus, “Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us.”**

**39**Jesus replied, “Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name There is power in the name. This principal is also spoken of in 1 Cor 12:3 “That is why I tell you that nobody who speaks in the Spirit of God ever says, ‘Cursed be Jesus.’ And no one can say: ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except in the Holy Spirit.” **who can at the same time speak ill of me.** God can work outside even his own established channels and he sometimes does.<sup>15</sup>

**40**For whoever is not against us is for us.

**41**Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward. The value and merit of good works lies mainly in the love of God with which they are done. A little act, done for love, is worth so much! God regards in a special way acts of service to others, however small.<sup>11</sup>

**42**Whoever causes one of these little ones Here Jesus means not simply children, but the unlearned, the insignificant. To scandalize one of these is to set his foot upon the road to hell and Jesus says that it would be better to be hurled to death by drowning than commit it! To all, including the most seemingly valueless, God has appointed an angel, and that angel maintains his own unbroken gaze upon God’s face.<sup>12</sup> **who believe in me to sin,** Scandal is anything said, done or omitted which leads another to commit sin. Causing scandal to children is especially serious, because they are so much less able to defend themselves against evil.<sup>11</sup> **it would be better for him if a great millstone** A millstone was used for grinding wheat and, usually made of basalt, could weigh as much as a ton.<sup>15</sup> **were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.** Here Jesus uses hyperbole or overstatement to emphasize that drastic measures are needed to avoid sin.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>43</sup>If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, Jesus refers to this valley southwest of Jerusalem 11 times in the Gospels as a dreadful symbol of hell. Two associations are made with Gehenna: It was the site of a frightful Canaanite cult that worshipped the idols of Molech and Baal by burning children in sacrifice. In the NT it served as a smoldering garbage dump where refuse burned continually. Jesus evokes these associations to teach us that hell is not a place of purification, but one of fiery punishment. In the afterlife, the bodies and souls of the wicked will suffer in hell for eternity.<sup>13</sup> into the unquenchable fire. This final section of the reading has some of the most dramatic language of the scriptures. The point of the hyperbole here is to emphasize beyond any doubt how important it is to enter the reign of God, no matter what the cost. Nothing, absolutely nothing is more important than belonging to the reign of God. Anything that jeopardizes our participation in it must be plucked out of our lives. Because grave (mortal) sins merit hell, avoiding them requires us to take action so serious that it can be compared to bodily dismemberment.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>45</sup>And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna. This is the basis of Christian moral teaching on the subject of “occasions of sin” — situations liable to lead to sin. The eternal good of our soul is more important than any temporal good. Therefore, anything that places us in proximate danger of committing sin should be cut off and thrown away. By putting things in this way our Lord makes sure we recognize the seriousness of this obligation. The Fathers see in these references to hands, eyes, etc., people who are persistent in evil and ever-ready to entice others to evil behavior and wrong beliefs. These are the people we should distance ourselves from, cut away from us, so that we can enter eternal life, even if it means without them, rather than accompany them to hell.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>47</sup>And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, Jesus makes one point in this whole section: if you want to be saved, remove all obstacles from your path!<sup>5</sup>

<sup>48</sup>where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’” The imagery of the worm and the fire for eternal punishment is drawn from Jewish tradition represented by Judith 16:17 — “In the day of judgment he will punish them: He will send fire and worms into their flesh and they shall burn and suffer forever.” These are the torments of hell. “The worm does not die” is explained as the eternal remorse felt by those in hell and the “fire which is not quenched” as their physical pain. The punishment in question is terrible and unending, although the chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.

*Some of the material for this commentary is taken from: (1) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 2006” by Martin Connell, (2) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 1997” by Lawrence E. Mick, (3) “The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch,” (4) “Dictionary Of The Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (5) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 1991” by Graziano Marcheschi with Nancy Seitz Marcheschi, (6) “Catechism Of The Catholic Church,” (7) “Christian Initiation And Baptism In The Holy Spirit” by Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, (8) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (9) “The Navarre Bible: Catholic Epistles,” (10) “The Letters Of James And Peter” by William Barclay, (11) “The Navarre Bible: St. Mark,” (12) “To Know Christ Jesus” by Frank Sheed, (13) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (14) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 2005” by Aelred R. Rosser, and “Mark: Good News for Hard Times” by George T. Montague, S.M.*

*In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*