



**Sept. 30, 2018 - Who Follows Whom?
Given by Rev. Mattei**

Jesus is still a “teacher” to John ([Mark 9:38](#)): Jesus is still kept at a comfortable distance with all the reverence and honor due to a teacher but not with the intimacy, hospitality and loyal dedication of a companion ([Jn 15:15](#)) as Jesus has wanted from the beginning ([Mk 3:13-20](#)). Yes, the disciples were chosen to be with Jesus and share in his life and ministry. But has this election gone to their heads? Are they a little too impressed with themselves to even argue about who of them was the most important ([Mk 9:33-37](#))? It must have been disconcerting to Jesus to hear John wonder whether another person, who admittedly has done something that promotes the kingdom of God, should be stopped. Why, he is certainly not following “us”. Jesus has gone over this in the past: no one is supposed to be in front of Jesus but behind Jesus ([Mk 8:32-34](#)). Is the Church perhaps taking Jesus’ place? Jesus calls the disciples to focus on what’s really important – doing the Lord’s work. And he reminds them that others, even some unlikely individuals, have a part in God’s plan. Casting out demons in Jesus’ name will be rewarded, even if you’re not a follower.

In Jesus’ reply to John’s question, we may hear frustration at John’s lack of understanding. Life in, with and through Jesus (i.e. in his name) is about welcoming one another (which is at the foundation of community life) and welcoming the little ones (which is a way of witnessing to their faith). If that open-hearted attitude is what defines a disciple, what Jesus warns about are the consequences that a refusal to operate according to that standard will bring: competition and ranking whether among the disciples or between the disciples and the people of good will around the world is not God’s way.

Evangelization is a way of being open in the world to what God is doing already in people's hearts; it's creating the possibility for others to acknowledge and serve Christ and receive their spiritual reward ([Mk 9:41](#)). God is at work in the world moving people through the power of the Spirit to do acts of kindness and justice, to show compassion and forgiveness and to engage in restorative justice. Those who follow Jesus are invited to simply be aware of the Spirit's movement, be receptive to it and be open to let go of any expectations of how the plan of God's salvation is supposed to unfold and manifest itself. We are witnesses to the presence and movements of the Spirit: Jesus encourages the disciples to be ruthless in rooting out anything in their own lives that might distract them from fulfilling God's purpose. The language is harsh, but it's balanced by a message of comfort. Because it's clear that a necessary part of doing the Lord's work is caring for his people (v. 41), it is a particular joy to be part of a Christian community where we are blessed to offer and receive support and comfort in Jesus' name.

The disciples are challenged to shed any hint of an arrogant sense of superiority that they may have on account of having been selected as companions of Jesus call and any hindrance to their call to be witness to God. If their life is dedicated to God and all they do is in the name of Jesus, how can they pretend to control the parameters of God's intervention in the world and dictate the criteria for belonging to the group of the saved? Who determines who belongs and what they can do in Jesus' name? The challenge for the disciples is to be open to have their perspective changed and see with new eyes. Once this happens it becomes easy for them to expand the consciousness of God's presence and activity in the world. Learning from Jesus becomes learning to see God operating through all people of good will and their loving actions as bringing glory to God.

Jesus' words are a warning to the faith community: there can be no control and monopoly of the Spirit! The Spirit can exercise extraordinary power even outside of the structured and official faith community. It is preposterous to try and control and dictate what godly people outside of the official community can or cannot do: people are not obliged to follow "us"

and their Spirit motivated actions cannot be contained just because they are not of our group ([Mk 9:40](#)). If that were the case, are the disciples elevating themselves above God, making an idol out of themselves (Mk 9:41)? God' Spirit is unpredictable and is manifested in many forms and ways: It operates where, how, when and through it wants. (Gv 3:8)

A life of faith marked by **acknowledgment of the other** (especially the vulnerable little ones) and **hospitality** towards them is always about the One who sent Jesus ([Mk 9:37](#)). Creating any obstacle or despising other people's good deeds is unbecoming of anyone who claims to operate in Jesus' name. Those who operate under the influence of his name (i.e., what he represents) are better prepared at identifying God's work in the world than those who operate under the influence of their ego who can only promote a personal project of salvation and a personal projection of success.

This week I invite you to look at the world with a new perspective:

- Where is God at work even in people who are not of our Christian fold?
- Where do we see modern equivalents of those who cast out demons in Jesus' name, but are not followers? Are they of another Faith? Are they atheists?
- Check inside: as we find them, do we notice any sense of superiority in us and dismissal of their good works? Any jealousy? Any attempt at judging, excluding or ranking?

Heavenly Father, we thank you every day for this community of faith. Help us always to share your love with each other, and as important, with those outside our community. Deliver us from evil, Lord, and make us ever diligent so that our hands, feet and eyes do not lead us astray, but are instruments we use to serve you. Amen.