

I made an amazing discovery during one of my sessions with young people a few years ago. I posed a question to them and their answer was quite startling. I asked them: where can we find role models in the world today? Whose words do we admire for their wisdom and hope? Whose actions impress us with their compassion? The response poured in like rain. Their replies surprised me and set me thinking. I thought they would focus on Catholic role models, but no, they went beyond our Catholic church to other faiths and spheres where role models came from. They mentioned Mother Teresa of Calcutta, John Paul II for his faith in young people, his great love for all people irrespective of race, creed or social status. Other names that came up were: Martin Luther King Jr the African American Baptist leader who in 1964 became the youngest person to win the prestigious Nobel Prize for peace.; Mahatma Gandhi, an Indian Hindu who believed in political change through non violence, Dalai Lama, a Buddhist spiritual leader who promotes peace internationally. Pop Stars and Actors who support justice campaigns on cancelling international debt, fair trade and poverty eradication all struck chords with the young university students. It is an issue for reflection that those young people look up to figures who in Catholic terms are not one of us and some who may even have little time for organized religion.

In today's Gospel, the disciples of Jesus refuse to recognize the authority of an exorcist who does not belong to their company. That exorcist has been successful in his ministry and this worries the disciples. The disciples are obviously threatened by the outsider's success. I wonder, are they apprehensive of being replaced? Were they threatened? Are they fearful of being supplanted? Do they see ministry in terms of rivalry? The disciples appear to feel diminished, reduced, lessened as disciples. Jesus refuses to join them. Instead, he wants his fragile company to a larger vision of God's goodness. He commands his followers to leave the outsider in peace. Anyone who is not against us is for us.

In a world where the disciples hope to be recognized and accepted in Jesus' name, Jesus asks them to extend the same favor to others. Why should the disciples hope for tolerance and hospitality while meeting with intolerance everywhere not their own company. Jesus is not threatened by goodness outside his own chosen circle. Jesus' passion is served by all who do the work of God. In that sense Jesus is indiscriminate when it comes to goodness, anyone will do. Jesus' attitude is instructive in many respects. The case for Catholicism is not served by the rejection of other ways of Christian discipleship. The cause for Christianity is not served by those who claim that no real good can happen beyond the boundaries of faith. We can all take pride in the community to which we belong without denigrating the good work of those who are not one of us. Jesus calls on each one of us to be tolerant. This sort of tolerance does not mean acceptance of any movement that happens to be in vogue or anything that mother church warns us against or anything that is fashionable. It is not the relativist morality of today nor the political correctness where anything goes as long as it serves our political goals. It is instead, a reverence for the truth that is larger than ourselves, a recognition of the charity that flourishes beyond the reaches of our borders and a respect for the freedom of God to move in his chosen ways. It is a realization that the Holy Spirit is ubiquitous and that God's love and mercy knows no bounds. After all, if God risks hoping in us, why should we deny his hope in others? And why should we not hope and trust in others as well.

Our world today needs vision. It needs hope. It needs the vision and hope of Jesus in the many possibilities of humanity. The Lord God is not a denominational God and a national God. There is only one God and this God loves humanity. There are no first or second class citizens in heaven. We should not label anyone as not one of us, because we are children of God and members of the household of God.