

Once there was a rich businessman who had a passion for racing cars. He went out and sought the best of the best to build his collection of custom race cars. He had experts in aerodynamics design the bodies of the vehicles to glide along the race track. The finest engineers tuned the engines of his vehicles so that his drivers had that extra boost when they needed it. He even assembled a team to build custom tires designed to help his cars hug turns like none other. For several years the rich businessman was extremely successful. The drivers of his custom cars won many of the top races around the world.

Speaking to the press after winning, the businessman always gave praise to his entire team for the work they did on his cars. But over the years, those who were in charge of maintaining the custom tires began to feel slighted. In their minds, he gave too much emphasis to the engineers while ignoring what they did. The seed of jealousy grew and grew until finally, one day, it became too much for them and the whole tire team quit. The businessman was unaware of this issue and the rest of the team was scared to break the news to him. So they came up with a plan. They would keep on doing their work on the other parts of the cars and just buy the top-of-the-line wheels being used by their competitors.

When the next race day came, all was looking good until the final stretch. Coming around the last turn, the businessman's car was passed by his arch rival and lost the race by a hair.

The moral of this story is that a team functions best when its members work together toward a common goal. When they get caught up in their own pursuits, they don't achieve the goal.

Today we see evidence of dysfunction in the team of Jesus' followers. They are having trouble working well because they misunderstand what Jesus is trying to do. The Gospel kicks off today with John, well known as the beloved disciple, not looking his best. He lets Jesus know that they have quashed the work of some people they had seen driving out demons in Jesus' name. It seems that perhaps the Apostles were feeling jealous of

another group of people performing mighty works who weren't part of their exclusive team. In their pride, they wanted to stop them! And if we remember last Sunday's Gospel, we can see that pride was a recurring issue for the apostles. Last Sunday we heard them arguing over who among them was the greatest.

So once again, here the disciples are trying to prove that they are better than others because they are closer to Jesus. They don't want anybody else doing the special work that Jesus instructed *them* to do. What they don't realize is that this goes against the goal of Jesus' ministry. He is not out to create an exclusive sect of miracle-workers. Rather, His vision is to extend healing and mercy as far and wide as possible, to build a kingdom of people to fulfill the hope of Moses from long ago.

Long before God the Son came down to earth, Moses also dealt with people who, in their pride, wanted to be the exclusive agents of God's gifts. The Holy Spirit enabled those 70 elders to prophesy, to speak God's truth for the benefit of the people of Israel. But they became jealous because two of the elders who were not there received the Spirit as well. God knew that He wanted to use these other two elders, and so He gave them His Spirit. Remember what Moses said when the others complained to him about those two elders? He said, "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!"

This is what Jesus' disciples don't understand. They don't recognize that He came to bring this hope of Moses to fulfillment. Jesus wants *all* people to be involved in the Kingdom of God He is establishing. He wants the Spirit to be bestowed on everyone. And this is what happens through the Church--through our Baptism we are joined to Jesus' priesthood, able to offer our lives for God and others. We are given the Spirit to speak the truth prophetically to others, and we all share in Jesus' royal dignity by conquering sin and death through Him. Jesus' kingdom isn't meant to be exclusive, it's meant to be expansive, to pull in as many as possible and involve them in the mission of Jesus in various and important ways.

The challenge with being part of this new Kingdom Jesus has established is that it calls for great humility: the ability to appreciate the gifts and talents of others without giving into jealousy, self-seeking and other sins that isolate us from others. There will always be the temptation to try to turn the Church into our own exclusive club, where each of us is a gatekeeper. But this is not Jesus' intention at all.

We can be tempted to see the Sacraments as special gifts exclusively for us. And it's true that Holy Communion and other Sacraments are reserved for those in full communion with the Church. But this isn't to keep others out, it's to invite them in! That way, they will be prepared to receive the Sacraments in the faith of the Church. Jesus doesn't want us to horde these great gifts for ourselves. He desires that our lived example of faith will draw more and more people to become full members of the Church so that they too can enjoy the fullness of the Sacraments! I pray that we all come to have this expansive attitude in our own hearts.

Another way the prideful attitude of exclusivity can seep in is when God chooses to work in unexpected ways. Sometimes, He chooses to work miracles in the lives of people who are either far from the Church or not part of the Church at all. This can be jarring if we have given into that exclusive attitude of heart. Exclusive thinking leads us to resent the good things that happen to those far from God. We let ourselves think that blessings should only be for us who are in the Church.

And God does work all the time in the Church through the Sacraments and the gifts He has given us as members of the Body of Christ. But He also works in mysterious ways that are according to His sovereignty. God is not bound by the Sacraments, we are. He works in power even outside the visible bounds of the Church in order to draw more people *into* the Church!

Remember the story I started with of the rich businessman and his race car team. They suffered because some of them allowed their hearts to become small. Our call is to abandon the smallness of heart that closes us off from

others and doesn't build the Kingdom. So let us pray this Sunday for the gift of magnanimity. 'Magnanimous' literally means 'big-souled.' Letting the Holy Spirit make our hearts magnanimous protects us from being closed off to others, whether inside or outside the Church. With magnanimous hearts, we can be free to use our gifts to serve others, without being jealous of how other people's gifts are being used. The Holy Spirit can even help us be big-hearted enough to *rejoice* when God in His mercy does something good for someone outside the Church whom we might consider unworthy. The more we become magnanimous, the more we can work together to build the Kingdom of God!

*+ Heavenly Father, thank you for teaching us through Your Son today. Jesus, give us the grace to remove that smallness of heart which goes against the expansion of your kingdom. Holy Spirit, please remove the pride that keeps us from being Your fit instruments in the Church. Make our hearts magnanimous by Your grace! We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen. +*