

SEPTEMBER 29 FATHER FRANCIS SALASAR

You might have heard about the story of this teacher, who told her students: “Go home and write down the names of the people you envy. But do not use paper for this. Write each name down on a separate potato, and bring me your potatoes tomorrow, so we can discuss them.”

The students were eager to complete the assignment. Some brought only two or three potatoes, others dragged in a heavy sack. However, the teacher didn't address the topic that day, only telling the students to bring the potatoes to the next lecture.

This happened over and over, and every day, the students carried their potatoes with them. The potatoes started rotting, and their weight became an annoyance.

The students initially hoped to air all their grievances about their enemies: this person doesn't deserve his marriage, and that person didn't earn her wealth, and so on. But as the stench of rotting followed them to class, they became thoroughly sick of the assignment.

At last, the teacher looked at them and said, “This situation is very similar to what you carry in your heart when you don't like some people. This hatred makes your heart unhealthy and you carry that hatred in your heart everywhere you go. If you can't bear the smell of spoiled potatoes for a week, imagine the impact on your heart of this hatred that you carry throughout your life. The more people you envy, the heavier your soul is. And for what? Nothing changes, you're just making it harder for yourself to enjoy life.”

Heaviness comes from clinging. Lightness comes from letting go. That's something similar, we hear in the gospel of today. The disciple John comes to Jesus with a complaint, that someone is casting out demons in Jesus' name, who do not follow Jesus. We can see that John wants to cling to the power given to him and other disciples by Jesus to chase out demons and do other miracles. But Jesus challenges John, by stating, do not stop him, whoever is not against us is for us.

This teaching is so relevant for us today, as we live in a time of cutthroat competition promoting one's own well-being at any cost. We should not think that salvation is reserved only for us who were baptized and who believe in Christ. Membership in his Church, faith, and the sacraments are still considered the ordinary ways to receive salvation, but this does not exclude the possibility that God could offer other ways of bringing people to encounter the 'paschal mystery of Christ' in their lives.

The catechism of the Catholic church teaches, that, 'Indeed, God "desires all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"; that is, God wills the salvation of everyone through the knowledge of the truth. Salvation is found in the truth. Those who obey the prompting of the Spirit of truth are already on the way of salvation.' (ccc 851).

But sometimes we could be like John, who can be a block for the mercy and compassion of God to reach our brothers and sisters. Often, people question how could God forgive so and so. He was such a terrible person, she was such a liar etc...etc...The one thing that we have to remember is God's ways are not ours. I am reminded of the quote from the scripture, 'Are you envious because I am generous'. (Mt 20.15)

Jealousy, envy and hatred are part of being human. But Jesus invites us and challenges us, to be different. Following Christ means, we are called to be superhumans in many ways. How else can you interpret, 'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (Mt 6.44) or if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also. (Mt 5.39). For sure, Christianity is not for the weak and faint heart. It is for the courageous.