

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Mark 9:38-50

Year B - Proper 21, Text: Mark 9:38-50
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Verse 9:38: This is the only narrative in Mark in which the Apostle John speaks. He states that the disciples tried to stop someone using Jesus' name to cast out demons because the person doing this was not a follower of Jesus. Oriental "holy men" often sought new spells and talismans. They used whatever "worked."

Verse 9:39: Jesus objects to the disciples' interference. He sees a potential doorway to faith for the would-be healer. The contrast between Jesus' message and ministry and the realm of the demonic is so very obvious. The person who experiences the "power of Jesus' name" will be won over to Jesus' cause.

Verse 9:40: There is no middle ground. People are either for Jesus or against Jesus.

Verse 9:41: "Because you bear the name of Christ" sounds somewhat Pauline. One might have expected, "...because you are Mine."

Jesus' mention of a reward is equally unexpected. Although Jesus will promise a reward for deeds of mercy, He stresses that His followers are to do what is right because that is what He expects of them. They are to do what is right as a response to the limitless grace that Jesus has lavished on them. God's people are not to do anything to earn a reward; they are to do everything out of gratitude to God for what He has done for them.

Verse 9:42: The cruel punishment of drowning people with a millstone tied to the neck was actually a Roman practice, although Josephus reports that certain Jews employed it in an uprising against the Herods (Antiquities XIV).

Verses 9:43-48: Earlier, Jesus says that the wiles of evil men are what cause the innocent to stumble. In these verses, he shows that the causes are internal: a hand, a foot, and an eye. Jesus uses the strongest figurative language possible, recommending the blinding

and maiming of oneself rather than thinking about doing evil.

Notes on Gehenna: The two alternatives are entrance into life and entrance into Gehenna — that valley west of Jerusalem used for the burning of refuse. In previous centuries, children had been burned there as offerings to Molech (see 1 Kings 11:7). In the apocalyptic literature of Jesus' day, it served as a symbolic name to describe the hellfire-like punishment of the wicked. Jesus conformed His speech to contemporary usage.

Down through the ages, the Church has always taught the reality of the punishment of the wicked, although whatever that grim experience might be, it is not an eternity on a burning refuse dump and infestations by worms. Jesus uses the vocabulary at His disposal to describe eternal spiritual ruin!

Verse 9:49: Verse 49 may have links to Leviticus 2:13, which states that cereal offerings are to be seasoned with salt. The meaning that "everyone will be salted with fire" may be eschatological. In the last days the wicked will be purified by fire and salt, just as the good are to be immersed in fire and the Spirit.

Verse 9:50: The final saying is in a different vein altogether. The seasoning properties of salt are good. They give taste to a meal, just as peace ensures joy in human relationships. The chemical change that makes salt lose its flavor while retaining its appearance (a natural phenomenon understood in Palestine still today) is presumed to be behind Jesus' saying.

