

Gehenna

26th week in Ordinary Time – Mark 9: 38-43,45,47-48

Gehenna was known to those of Jesus' time as "the city". It was a place full of decay, rotting waste, constant fire and, often, the burial ground for the poor. The fire that burned there never went out. It was a place where no one wanted to go as it embodied the fear and the reality of death. The dump was a wasteland where the marginalized of the time scavenged for food or took shelter. There are similar places in the world today where the poor and abandoned live and die. No wonder the Christian tradition has referred to hell as a place of eternal fire.

Jesus uses this physical landmark to illustrate a spiritual truth. Our lives must reflect the gospel. Our lives must speak the truth in virtue and in holiness. To do otherwise casts us out of a relationship with Christ and our relationships with those with whom we live, work and build society. In other words, we are called to build up the mission of Christ together.

The disciples are concerned about those who are driving out demons in Jesus' name without benefit of their (the disciples) approval. Jesus tells them, "**There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me.**" Jesus seems to say that if someone is speaking the Truth then there is no need for concern. Look within yourselves for those things that destroy.

Jesus goes on to say that our eternal fate lies, most significantly, in a virtuous life. We have a responsibility to live in such a way that we model Christ in all that we do. If we don't, we run the risk of ending up in Gehenna. "**Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.**"

Jesus' examples of this seem harsh. If your hand, or foot or eye causes you to sin, cut it off. And yet, spiritually speaking, those parts of us (our sins) that do not raise us up to live in virtue and holiness should be spiritually severed, atonement made, and our lives changed. This is part of the call to realign our lives toward the gospel and live in accordance with Christ.

Blessings!


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