

# Our Sunday Readings

NUMBERS 11:25-29  
 PSALM 19:8, 10, 12-14  
 JAMES 5:1-6  
 MARK 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

## Scandals

### JAMES 5:1-6

#### Reading closely

1. What's happening to the rich? Is this happening now or in the future?
2. What all is a *testimony against* the rich?
3. To what could *the last days* refer?
4. What/Who is *crying aloud*? Why?
5. What makes the rich ready for *the day of slaughter*?
6. Why haven't the righteous resisted the rich?
7. How might wealthy people have reacted to these words?
8. How might poor people have reacted to these words?

#### Living the word

9. Do you think of yourself as rich or poor? With whom are you comparing yourself?
10. Do you wish you had more money? Why?
11. How can material possessions endanger our relationship with God?
12. How can wealth endanger our relationship with others?

*"If your hand causes you to sin,  
 cut it off!"*

### THE SECOND READING

#### What to treasure

The gold and silver that the wealthy have accumulated won't help them on the day of judgment. Such possessions are as useless as rust; they pass away. Justice and compassion, by contrast, are true and lasting treasures.

#### The poor and the just

This passage draws on the language of the prophets who repeatedly warned that God would punish those who oppress the poor. God's concern for the poor is a major theme of the Old Testament and Jesus' ministry.

This letter also echoes the biblical wisdom tradition. James condemns those who oppress the just, *the righteous one* (v.6; compare Wisdom 2:10f.) The just are trying to live as God intends.

#### The day of slaughter

By oppressing the poor in order to accumulate their wealth, the rich reveal their indulgence and self-interest. Their hearts have grown fat on gluttony and greed, making them easy prey for God and his heavenly army (*the hosts*) when the day of judgment (*slaughter*) comes.

**MARK 9:38-41**

1. How might the disciples have tried to stop the man from expelling demons?
2. How might the man have reacted to the disciples?
3. Why do you think the disciples objected to the man's actions?
4. How might the disciples have felt when Jesus allowed the man to continue?
5. Who do you think of as an insider?
6. Who do you think of as an outsider?
7. How does Jesus redefine our boundaries?
8. What's a modern-day example of v.41?

**MARK 9:42-48**

9. What are some examples of how a person could intentionally cause someone else to sin?
10. What are some examples of how a person could accidentally cause someone to sin?
11. In what ways are we affected when we cause someone to sin?
12. What are some things people have to *cut* or *pluck out* of themselves?
13. What do you need to cut out of your life?
14. How effective do you find Jesus' imagery?

**THE GOSPEL READING**

***Insiders & Outsiders (vv.38-41)***

There were both Jewish and pagan exorcists at the time of Jesus. The man in this story may have been doing exorcisms for years or only after he heard about Jesus. Regardless, he was using Jesus' name to vanquish demons, but he wasn't one of Jesus' followers.

The disciples want to stop the man from drawing on Jesus' power. They might be jealous: in 9:17 we learn that they failed to cast out a demon. Whatever their motivation, they think in narrow terms: the man isn't a disciple, therefore he should be treated as an outsider. Jesus disagrees. By expelling evil the man has aligned himself with Jesus and God's kingdom.

***Better off dead (v.42)***

Verse 42 is also translated "Whoever scandalizes one of these little ones..." Jesus warns people in authority not to place a stumbling block in the path of those who have faith in him. Such action could provoke a believer to sin and/or to lose faith. God will deal so severely with those responsible that it would be better if they had died in some horrible, frightening manner.

***Cut off! (vv.43-48)***

After warning people not to lead others into sin, Jesus warns against allowing one's self to sin. His vivid, hyperbolic language emphasizes the importance of taking radical action to avoid sin. It's better to cut off something that feels essential to us than to be permanently cut off from God.

***Gehenna***

Gehenna was a valley near Jerusalem that had been the site of pagan sacrifice. By Jesus' day it was a vast garbage dump. Jesus uses Gehenna in order to say, "You think it's hard to stop committing that sin? It would be a lot worse to spend the rest of your life in burning, rotting garbage with only maggots for company." The pain of cutting out a particular sin is far more bearable than that.

**PRAYER**

*by Thomas Á Kempis*

God our Father,  
 we are exceedingly frail and indisposed to every  
 virtuous and gallant undertaking.  
 Strengthen our weakness,  
 we beseech you,  
 that we may do valiantly in this spiritual war.  
 Help us against our own negligence and  
 cowardice, and defend us from the treachery of  
 our unfaithful hearts,  
 for the sake of Jesus Christ.  
 Amen.