

Homily for Sunday, September 27, 2009 (26th Sunday in Ordinary Time)
Num 11:25-29; Ps 19:8-10, 12-14; Jas 5:1-6; Mk 9:38-43, 47-48
Family Day—St. Lawrence Seminary, Mt. Calvary, WI

Most members of the 1958 University of Buffalo football team can remember the 1958 season as if it was yesterday. After compiling a record of 8-1, they were awarded the Lambert Cup as the nation's best small college football team; and for the first time in school history, they received a bid to play in a bowl game—the Tangerine Bowl.

Willie Evans, Gerry Gergley, Stanley Kowalski and the other players were looking forward to escaping the snow and cold of Buffalo for a chance to represent their school in warm and sunny Orlando. But there was a problem. The Orlando School District owned the stadium where the Tangerine Bowl was to be played; and like many southern districts at the time, it banned integrated games. The Bulls would only be allowed to play in the game only if they kept their two African-American players home. They had to vote about whether to accept the bid.

"There really wasn't a vote," Gergley recalled. "We had no choice. We had to do what was right. Besides, Willie (Evans) was our leading rusher and scorer." So the University of Buffalo Bulls stayed home in 1958.

But last Saturday night, local government and civil leaders in Orlando repaid a historic debt. After paying for their air and hotel fares and meals, they honored the 50 surviving players from the University of Buffalo team of 1958 during the half-time of a game at Bright House Stadium, where the Bulls were playing the University of Central Florida. It was the longest trip in college football bowl history—one measured not in miles but in years and completed not by those who were excluded but rather by those who, after fifty-one years, were now included and their achievement recognized.

The word today challenges us to measure God's power and grace not by who we keep out but rather by who we invite and gather in. Earlier in Numbers 11, we find Moses and the Israelites in the desert on their journey to the Promised Land. The people were complaining that all they had to eat was the manna that the Lord had provided. But they didn't want manna; they wanted meat! In their hunger, even their lives and the food they had back in Egypt looked good.

Worn out by their complaining, Moses turned toward God and said: "Why do you treat your servant so badly? I cannot carry this people by myself, for they are too heavy for me!" He went on: "If this is the way you will deal with me, please do me the favor of killing me at once, so that I need no longer face this distress" (Num 11:11, 14-15).

Needless to say, God didn't grant Moses' request. However, God did respond to Moses' need, telling him to bring together seventy elders of the people to the tent of meeting. As we heard in our first reading, "Taking some of the spirit that was on Moses, the LORD bestowed it the seventy elders" (Num 11:25a). Unfortunately two of them, Eldad and Medad, missed the meeting. Yet, as this passage notes, "the spirit came to rest on them also." God blessed them, even though they weren't with the rest.

When some of the other elders sought to stop them from prophesying because they didn't make the meeting, Moses' response was not one of exclusion but rather one of inclusion. Indeed, he went even further, exclaiming, "Would that all the people of the LORD were prophets! Would that the LORD might bestow his spirit on them all!"

In our gospel reading, Jesus was faced with a situation like that of his ancestor Moses. When his disciples complained about some one who wasn't part of their group driving out demons in Jesus' name, the Lord told them not to worry about it. "There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name," he said, "who can at the same time speak ill of me" (Mk 9:39b).

Implied in Jesus' message to the disciples is something that, even after nearly 2000 years, our Church and world are still struggling to realize: the things that unite us can and should be far stronger than the things that divide us. Jesus wasn't worried about those whom his disciples complained about because they were doing his work (driving out demons) and doing it in his name. They were fulfilling a common mission in a common name for the common good.

We live in a world where the common good is often forgotten. The New York Attorney General recently reported that in 2008 Citigroup paid out over \$5.3 *billion* in bonuses to its top bankers and traders—at the same time the bank posted a loss of nearly \$28 billion and received a taxpayer-funded bailout of \$45 billion!

That brought to mind James' very strong words to the rich in our second reading, where he strongly condemned them not for their wealth but rather for their greed, corruption, and exploitation of the day laborers who worked for them. While they lived "in luxury and pleasure," their workers didn't even receive the pay that they had earned and couldn't feed their families.

While they are not distributed in the same way and in the same amount, the goods of our world and the goods of the Spirit are given to all for the good of all. What has God given you, and how have you been called to share it? Through God's grace and our own work, let us be living stones (1 Pet 2:4-5) and not millstones in our world. +