

Prophets From Outside the Circle
September 26, 2021, Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel of Mark 9:38-48
Fr. John

The other day I happened to catch a news item that dealt with a young indigenous girl who was dancing on the lawn outside the General Hospital. She was wearing a ceremonial dress and said that it was a traditional dance for healing for her Kokum [grandmother] who was being treated for the Covid virus in one of the units in the hospital.

This healing gesture was not only being done outside of the physical confines of the hospital but also outside of the usual medical practices and the accepted spiritual practices [like the Catholic sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick].

If you were to ask me if what the girl was doing was actually achieving what it was intended to do. I would have to shrug my shoulders and say 'well...it can't really hurt'. And further to that ... it was a lot more positive than the actions of those who have been gathering outside of some of our medical centres to hurl abuse and insults at nurses and medical staff going about their work.

In our Old Testament and gospel readings today, we have parallel accounts of complaints of elders gathered around Moses, and the inner circle of Jesus' disciples that there were those doing God's work **outside** of **their** select group.

But both Moses and Jesus have a rather surprising response to those complaints.

Rather than seeking out and admonishing these 'unauthorized' prophets and disciples, Moses and Jesus praised them for their zeal. 'Would that **all** the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit in them'; '**Whoever** is not against us is **for** us'

We have to be open to the fact that God sometimes acts **outside** of our accepted parameters of authority. Otherwise we may find ourselves taking on God's role of judging definitively who is authentic and who is not.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. He reminds his disciple that even recognized authority must be accountable for its actions. He uses some very stark hyperbole concerning millstones around our necks and some painful amputations to describe what should happen to those who abuse their power and authority.

Those of us who have titles and authoritative status in the Church are well aware of the consequences resulting from clergy child sexual abuse and the whole residential school debacle.

On an even broader scope, the letter of James contains a warning to all who live an entitled life [and to one extent or another most of us do]. We must not neglect the needs of the poor - whether these are material, emotional, or spiritual needs.

The Church, which is the community of Christ's disciples, is to be the guiding light that leads us in the way of Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And yes... sometimes that community stumbles badly in its human faults. Yet, time and time again, with the strength of God's Holy Spirit, it picks itself up and learns more deeply what it ought to be.

Spiritual leadership can sometimes come from unexpected places.

So maybe that young indigenous girl is not only dancing for the health of her kokum - her grandmother but for all of us as well. For the healing that we all so badly need.