

Afflicting the Comfortable

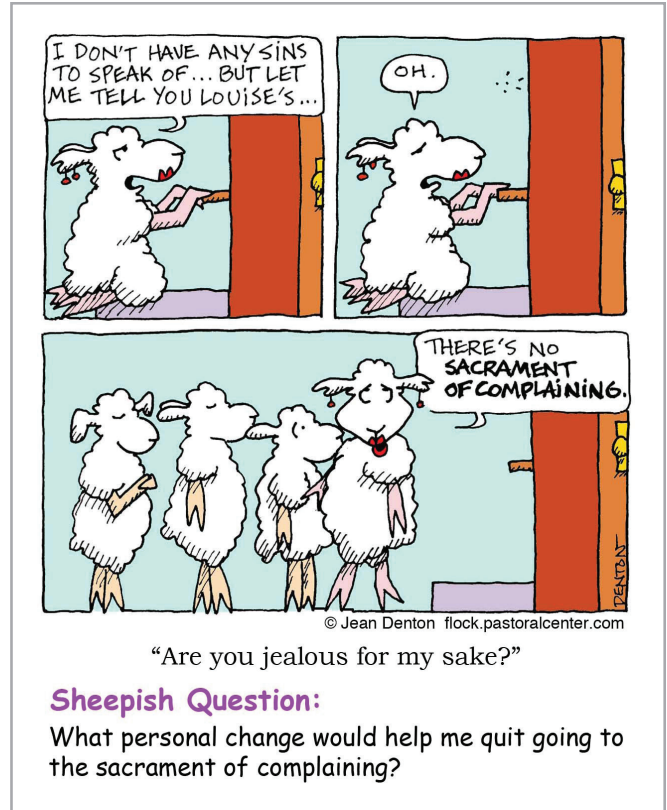
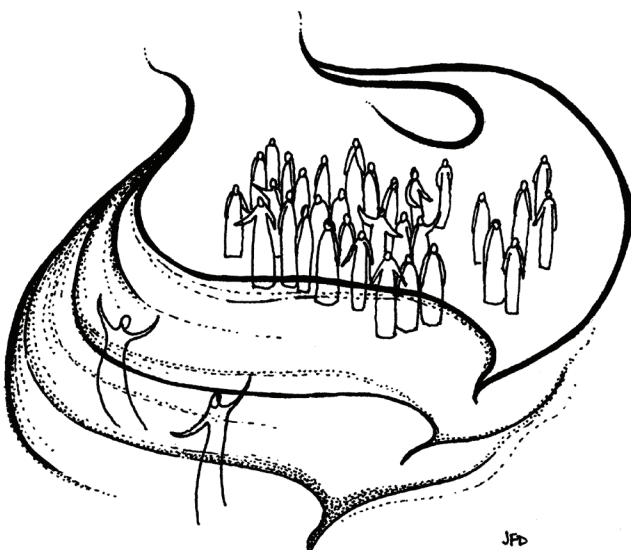
This Week's Readings at Mass

- ▶ Numbers 11:25-29 - Sharing the gift of prophecy
- ▶ James 5:1-6 - Saving the right focus
- ▶ Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48 - Whoever is not against us is for us

Once again we focus on a lesser known passage from the Letter of James. It is one of those Bible passages that “afflicts the comfortable and comforts the afflicted.”

James’ strong words for the rich are perfectly in line with Jesus and passages in the Old Testament warning about making money by dishonest means, putting our security in worldly goods and accumulating wealth while neglecting the needy.

In fact, Jesus told more parables about economic injustice than he did about any other topic. His parable about Lazarus called out the sinfulness of one man being extravagantly wealthy while another man didn’t have enough to eat. Jesus critiqued the farmer who built bigger barns to store his harvest only to die suddenly. (If he had such abundance, maybe he hadn’t followed the Old Testament laws about sharing his harvest with the poor.) Another time, Jesus exposed the religious authorities who gave the required tithes but “neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith” (Mt. 23:23).



In the same way, James condemns the rich who have stored up material goods that will only rot away. (“You’ll never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul. You can’t take anything with you.”) He also criticizes those who have lived in pleasure and luxury because they have defrauded others. Although we may be tempted to ignore this reading, assuming it doesn’t apply to us, perhaps there is something here for us to acknowledge if we look deeper.

Questions of the Week

- 1 In what ways do people today continue to defraud, cheat, or take advantage of others, some of which may be socially acceptable (ex: paying less than a living wage to house cleaners, babysitters, or gardeners; skimping on tips for waiters; indirectly paying below minimum wage to farmworkers who pick produce, etc.?)
- 2 What invitation do you hear in this passage to change the way you relate to money or possessions?