

As you heard me read this text, did you find one word sticking out like a sore thumb? It comes toward the end when Joshua wants Moses to stop Eldad and Medad from prophesying. Moses asks, *“Are you jealous for my sake?”* That’s the word—*jealous*—from which we get the word *jealousy*. We don’t usually think very highly of someone being jealous, do we? We think of being jealous in terms of envying others because of their prestige, their power, or their possessions. We tend to make jealousy synonymous with coveting or greed or lust.

In this text, however, jealousy is used in a positive way. In his introduction to the Ten Commandments God says, *“I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God” (Dt 5:9)*. He tells us that he is a jealous God because he isn’t willing to give his glory to another or his praise to idols. He doesn’t want us to worship anyone or anything but him. Through the Prophet Isaiah he tells us why. *“There is no God apart from me,”* he says, *“a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me” (45:21)*. Because God is the only true God and our only Savior, he has the right to be jealous—to demand for himself the honor, the glory, and the praise that are rightfully his.

In our text today we are reminded that, rather than being jealous for all the wrong things and for all the wrong reasons, we can be jealous when we are so for the right things and for the right reasons. In Jesus’ words, we can be jealous when we *“seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (Mt 6:13)*. In short, we are to be jealous for the kingdom of God. Today, then, we are encouraged to:

Break the Huddle—with Jealousy for the Kingdom of God

- 1. Don’t be jealous for yourself.**
- 2. Be jealous for the God of your salvation.**

1. Our text finds the Israelite people wandering in the wilderness on their 40-year journey from Egypt to Palestine. Moses is leading them, and he has a mega congregation. Not just mega by our standards of 1800+ confirmed members and another 500 or so baptized. Moses has 600,000 family units in his congregation—the entire Israelite nation. And this nation is much too heavy for Moses to cart around alone.

The people are grumbling to Moses. He feels caught in the middle and, in turn, grumbles to God. But in the midst of his heart-rendering prayer is a request for help, much like Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: *“Not my will, but yours be done” (Lk 22:42)*. Moses prays, *“If I have found favor in your eyes” (Nu 11:15)*. In mercy God answers and says, *“Bring me seventy of Israel’s elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.”*

With understanding and compassion God answers Moses’ prayer by providing the administrative help that Moses so desperately needs. He tells Moses to appoint seventy elders to be his assistants. On these respected and trusted leaders God will pour out his Holy Spirit.

That’s exactly what happens. One Bible scholar has used the analogy of lighting seventy candles from one candle, much like we do in our Christmas Eve candlelight service. The symbolism is that we extend the fire and light of the first candle—in this case, the Christ Candle—to many others without diminishing the power and effect of the first candle. In a sense, it’s multiplication by division; not partitioning, but extending. When these seventy men receive the Spirit of God, they begin to prophesy, that is, to proclaim the truth of God’s saving Word.

For some unknown reason, two of the men selected, Eldad and Medad, do not present themselves at the tabernacle. They begin prophesying, or preaching, in the camp. Some, including Joshua, feel that these two are way out of line and should be silenced. Moses, however, responds with the jealousy question, *“Are you jealous for my sake?”* and then proceeds to say, *“I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them.”*

All this brings us back to our theme for today: *Break the Huddle—with Jealousy for the Kingdom of God*. Why do you think Joshua and the others were upset with Eldad and Medad? Why do you think they wanted Moses to silence them? Why was John in our Gospel today upset with the man driving out demons? There are many different possibilities, of course, but isn’t nearly every one of them grounded in selfishness and self-concern? Weren’t they jealous for themselves?

That shouldn't surprise us. That's the way of the world. At every turn the world tells us that we're the center of the universe, that everything revolves around us and around our needs and desires. Because every one of us carts around a sinful nature, we often feel the same way. Seeking God's kingdom and his righteousness is sometimes the farthest thing from our mind. "What's in it for me?" "How do I benefit from it?" These are the questions we tend to ask. The Apostle Paul nails it on the head when he writes, *"Everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ"* (Php 2:21). We need to recognize that, if we're jealous for the wrong things or for the wrong reasons, that's sin. For all our selfish attitudes and actions, for all our self-centered hang-ups and habits, we need to repent. We need to be reminded not to be jealous for ourselves but for the God of our salvation.

2. And the way we start is by taking the focus off ourselves and, in faith, putting it on God, a God who, as we heard before, *"is a righteous God and a Savior"* (Is 45:21); a God who *"takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked"* (Ezk 18:25); a God who *"does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance"* (2 Pt 3:9); a God who *"so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (Jn 3:16).

When we focus on and rejoice in the God of our salvation; the God of mercy and grace and forgiveness; the God who *"in Christ reconciled the world to himself, not counting [our] sins against [us]"* (2 Cor 5:19), then we find that we want to do God's will; we want to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness; we want to build up and strengthen his kingdom among us. We see ourselves as part of the team, part of the whole, and not as lone rangers—like Moses, trying to do everything by ourselves or, in some self-serving way, shutting ourselves off from the rest of our Christian family.

One of the greatest blessings of membership in God's family of believers is that every child of God is privileged to share in the mission and ministry of God's kingdom. In fact, one of your brothers in Christ is overwhelmed with a spirit of appreciation every time he's asked to help with the distribution of the Lord's Supper. Another expresses her joy at the privilege of being a shepherd and making regular contacts with her fellow members. These are just two small

examples of the joy to be found in service in God's kingdom. It's not difficult to see that God's work is best done when all of his people share in this work.

We call this the Priesthood of All Believers. We recognize that in Holy Baptism God pours out his Spirit, anointing and appointing ministers in his kingdom, to use whatever gifts, talents, and abilities he has given for the growth and strengthening of his church. We recognize also that certain individuals are called into public ministry—to be pastors, teachers, and staff ministers—but that, ultimately, every Christian has been called by God to serve as a member of his team. And why? The Apostle Peter says, *"To declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light"* (1 Pt 2:9).

God is glorified when we work together to bring his kingdom to others. History shows that that kingdom grows one individual at a time. While Jesus certainly is the Light of the world, to you and me he says, *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven"* (Mt 5:14-16). The fire and light of the Christ Candle have been given to each of us. We live with the promise and the power of the Spirit of God. Subduing our selfishness, our self-concern, and our self-centeredness, let's seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness. Let's be jealous for the God of our salvation. And let's do it as a team, united in Christ. Amen.