

Jesus and Gehenna (26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Numbers 11:25-29—the Spirit Comes Upon Eldad and Medad

1. 70 Elders: receive the “Spirit” of God to assist Moses (11:25)
2. Prophets: receive the “spirit” of “prophecy” in the “camp” (11:25-29)

Psalm 19—Cleanse Me of Sin, Lord!

1. Hidden Faults: “Who can discern his errors? Cleanse me of hidden faults” (v. 12)
2. Freedom from Sin: “Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins” (v. 13)

James 5:1-6—Warnings again Oppressive Rich Christians

1. Wealth: “come now, you rich, weep and howl...” (5:1)
2. Luxury and Oppression: you have “lived in luxury” and “killed the righteous” (5:6)

Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48—Jesus and the Fires of Gehenna

1. The Gravity of Scandal:
 - a. Little Ones = “Child” or “Small” or “Insignificant” (Greek *mikros*)
 - b. Millstone: “donkey stone” (Greek *mylos onikos*), large stone for grinding grain
2. The Gravity of Sin:
 - a. Hand: “cut it off”; Foot: “cut it off”; Eye: “pluck it out”
 - d. Better to enter “Life” (Greek *zōē*) than be cast into “Hell” (Greek *geenna*)
 - e. Better to enter “the kingdom of God” (Greek *basileia tou theou*)
3. The Reality of Hell: Gehenna (Aramaic for “Land of Hinnom”)

And they have built the high place of Topheth, which is in *the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire*; which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind. (Jeremiah 7:31)

- a. The Worm: “does not die” (everlasting corruption)
- b. The Fire: “is not quenched” (everlasting pain)

For as *the new heavens and the new earth* which I will make shall remain before me, says the Lord; so shall your descendants and your name remain...And they shall go forth and look on the dead bodies of the men that have rebelled against me; for *their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched...*” (Isaiah 66:22, 24)

The Catechism on the Reality of Hell

Jesus often speaks of “Gehenna,” of “the unquenchable fire” reserved for those who to the end of their lives refuse to believe and be converted, where both soul and body can be lost...*The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity.*

The Mass Readings Explained

Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, “eternal fire.” The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs. (CCC 1034-35)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

1. What is the significance of Eldad and Medad receiving the spirit of “prophecy” although they are not members of the 70 Elders?

2. What did Jesus teach about the reality of “Hell” or “Gehenna”? How seriously does Jesus take sin?

3. What does the Catechism teach about the reality of Hell? (See CCC 1034-35).

For Further Study

1. Mary Healy. *The Gospel of Mark*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. Pp. 186-92.
2. Edith Barnecut, *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels Year B* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1993), 120-21.