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Gifts - Authorized and Not

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 29, 2009 NCR Today

The first reading and the Gospel this past Sunday both involved the unauthorized use of divine gifts and the challenge to that use by those in authority, or better to say, by those of lesser authority. The unauthorized were prophesying in the camp of the Israelites and some who were not followers of Jesus were casting out demons in his name. Disciples of both Moses and Jesus took umbrage at these unauthorized acts and, in both cases, Moses and Jesus ? those with true and full authority ? pointed out that God is the author of such gifts and that no one should be jealous of their use.

This brought to mind an observation that Balthasar used to make at the close of his retreats for priests. He recalled the closing scene in the Gospel of John when Peter is jealous and asks what is to happen to the beloved disciple. Balthasar would comment ?It is not [Peter?s] business to know exactly where the boundaries between the official Church and the Church of love are to be found?.The last thing said to the servant Peter, the last word of the Lord in the Gospel, is the watchword for the Church and theology in every age: ?What is that to you???

It is a powerful observation, and one that we bloggers who never finished our theology degrees like a lot. But, we should also be mindful that in the readings last Sunday, and in John?s Gospel, the gifts of the Spirit are just that, gifts. They are to be received in gratitude and humility and shared abundantly with our brothers, always respectful of authority, but mindful that it is God who sends the gifts.

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