

Who's in and who's out?

Certainly a question
that resonates with the disciples ...

And thinking this way
can easily draw lines in the sand ...

Who's in and who's out?

We all like to be included ...
accepted ... as an insider.

We dislike being left out;
We dislike not being noticed;
We dislike it when our voice is not counted
and taken seriously.

We dislike others taking the front seat
(except maybe in church);

We like to think that we deserve our due ...
often.

We are hard workers.
We do what we are asked.

We are faithful to our Sunday obligation.
We attend to our daily prayer.

We kindly turn to those in need.

Let's face it,
feeling included and having a place
has a strong grip on our hearts.

And so, when others receive their due
without any hard work
or are considered part of the inside group
without going through all of the rigmarole
of training or an education,
we can easily wring our hands begrudgingly,

"How can this be"

Or we shout out,
"That's not fair!"

Or we can get self-righteous,
"I did all that was asked,
I read, I studied, I prayed
and he ... she did none of that,
so why do they receive all the accolades."

Sound familiar.
It should ...
sounds like something
those befuddled friends of Jesus would say
and, if I am honest with myself,
it sounds like me too.

Certainly our readings
get in touch into these same emotions:

"Teacher,
we saw someone driving out demons
in your name,
and we tried to prevent him
because he does not follow us."

John's complaint
has almost a whiny, tattletale tone to it.

"Look, we have followed you over a year;
we have listened to your teaching.
Who is this guy?
Aren't you going to tell him to stop?

Besides, he is stealing our thunder.

C'mon, we are your 'guys'."

The disciples thought
that their following was better;

that they knew more,
that they could do greater things,
that they even loved more.

And to think this way
is to draw lines.

Whenever you want to draw lines

in order to mark who is
outside the kingdom and who is inside,

always remember:

Jesus is on the other side of the line.
Jesus is always with the outsiders.

The church is not a private club,
or a gated community.
God has poured out the Spirit
on all the baptized,
and sometimes,
even on those outside our community.

It is the same sentiment
when Joshua turns toward Moses and says,

"Eldad and Medad
are prophesying in the camp.

Moses, stop them."

Joshua seems to resent God's magnanimity
and the elect's loss of unique privilege with Moses.

And God?

Not at all hampered or limited
by the strictures Joshua wants to put on God.

Moses recognizes this.

All the better that Eldad and Medad are prophesying.

Thank goodness they received the spirit too!
We are so much for the better
with the voices of "outsiders" included.

When we begin to think
that we have a corner on the truth,
we might want to open our eyes and ears
to what God is doing on the other side of the line.

Friends,

we have a God whose grace is freely given.
It is gracious, expansive,
 inclusive and magnanimous

to

sinners and saints;
laity and religious;
women and men;
young and old;
gay and straight;
poor and wealthy;
Catholic and non-Catholic;

And our community is much better for it ...
God's grace scattered
to those we "expect" to receive it
and even to those we least expect ...

Each has a voice
and each can advance the Kingdom of God ...

The spirit cannot be confined;
the spirit blows where it will.

Certainly,
the Church came to see this most profoundly,
when just about 50 years ago,
on October 11, 1962,
the Second Vatican Council opened
at St. Peter's Basilica.

The windows of the Church opened
and God's spirit blew through the Church
into every nook and cranny
giving the Church a voice to the modern world ...

As Jesuit John Schlegel,
publisher of America Magazine put in a recent blog,

"Moses understood that God is the one
who chooses those on whom the spirit will rest.
Both Jesus and Moses make clear
that when God acts through someone,
we are not to judge or thwart their efforts,

but to accept and respect God's working
through whomever God chooses.
(This was abundantly evident during Vatican II)."

One final thought,
just as God is inclusive, gracious,
expansive and magnanimous
in the giving of her grace,
so ought we pray for the grace
to cultivate a life of gracious receiving of God's
to whomever receives it.

That is,
can we be content with
where the Spirit blows
knowing that whoever receives the gift of the spirit
that God's work will be advanced
and that our community
will be greatly enriched.