



Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

38 John said to Jesus, 'Master, we saw a man who is not one of us casting out devils in your name; and because he was not one of us we tried to stop him.' 39 But Jesus said, 'You must not stop him: no one who works a miracle in my name is likely to speak evil of me. 40 Anyone who is not against us is for us.

41 'If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink just because you belong to Christ, then I tell you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward.

42 'But anyone who is an obstacle to bring down one of these little ones who have faith, would be better thrown into the sea with a great millstone round his neck. 43 And if your hand should cause you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life crippled, than to have two hands and go to hell, into the fire that cannot be put out. 45 And if your foot should cause you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life lame, than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. 47 And if your eye should cause you to sin, tear it out; it is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell 48 where their worm does not die nor their fire go out.'

Other readings: Numbers 11:25-29 Psalm 18 (19) James 5:1-6

This gospel reading contains a collection of different sayings of Jesus. The first speech warns us against the exclusive attitude which says that, unless someone completely shares our opinions and our faith, they can do no good. The next saying seems to confirm this. Any good deed from whatever source, Jesus implies, should be welcomed and will be rewarded.

Jesus then speaks of 'obstacles' placed in the way of believers, the 'little ones' who have faith. The Greek word used here is similar to the word 'scandal'. To scandalise others, to violate their faith, to undermine their pursuit of what is good and right, is plainly wrong.

Jesus then apparently suggests that self-mutilation, cutting off hand or foot, and tearing out the eye, would be better than sinning. What are we to make of this? This is an extreme way of pointing out the seriousness of sin. Christians should understand the strength of what Jesus is saying, but Christian teaching has never condoned self-harm of this magnitude.

Finally, what are we to make of the references to hell and its eternal fire? The Church teaches us that the image of eternal fire is an attempt to express the dreadful pain of losing God and of shutting oneself off from the love of others. This pain is worse than any physical suffering.

*How accepting am I of the goodness of those who do not share my beliefs?*

*Do I place obstacles in the way of others, undermining their faith and goodness?*

*We pray for the zeal which always seeks what is good.*

*We pray for confidence in the goodness of God.*