

From John's words, it appears that the apostles are trying to restrict Jesus' influence to their own small circle. They feel that the healing work of Jesus should be confined to them. They want something others don't have – perhaps to be honoured for it and to exercise power over others. Jesus makes clear that he does not support restricting God's power for good. Wherever evil is eradicated, the work has God's blessing.

This same message is given by Moses in today's Old Testament reading. Joshua contends that the Lord's spirit of prophecy can only enter those individuals who were "in the gathering" when that spirit was bestowed. Moses teaches that prophetic ministry can be exercised by anyone.

Application

The mission of healing and saving humanity and the world is not the sole responsibility of the disciples, or, in today's world, of clergy, or of Catholics. It is a mission that is entrusted to everyone. Jesus does not want to close the circle around him. As long as healing and reconciliation are taking place, Jesus does not draw boundaries. His followers are called to cooperate with all those in the world who are promoting human dignity, assisting those who are vulnerable and taking responsibility for building a more just world.

This is why Christian agencies have worked with Muslim relief agencies in Pakistan to bring humanitarian aid to earthquake victims; why Pope John Paul II met with pop stars Bob Geldof and Bono in 1999 to support the campaign for the debts of poor countries to be cancelled; why Christian campaigners against nuclear weapons rub shoulders with secular anti-nuclear organisations. In many local areas, churches link with secular bodies and other faiths in soup runs and schemes for befriending vulnerable people.

Jesus asks a lot of us here. Be easy on others, give them the benefit of the doubt, assume that God is working in them. Do not seek the prestige of wealth, possessions and power for yourself, and refuse to exploit others. Instead, demand simplicity, honesty and repentance as you push towards spiritual growth. God's Spirit is within our family and neighbours, and perhaps we can learn to recognise the prophets among us and listen to them.

Perhaps too we can begin to recognise the prophet deep inside our own selves that cautions us to be kind and gracious, not to support the waging of war and not to hurt or diminish the least among us.