

FR. PETER'S SUNDAY HOMILY
TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Pope Francis likes to take secret trips out of the Vatican. He uses a simple unmarked car and an ordinary guy as his driver.

On one occasion he had a new driver who was not prim and proper like the Swiss Guards; he had long hair and a beard. Pope Francis decided that he wanted to drive, so he and the driver traded places.

Now, Pope Francis has a lead foot – he took off speeding – and got pulled over by a rookie Italian policeman.

The policeman approached the car and sees the Pope in the driver's seat and the bearded man with long hair in the back.

He ran back to his car and radioed headquarters. "I've made a big mistake! I've pulled over someone very important."

The officer on the other end asked, "Who? The mayor?" "No, not the mayor."

"The governor?" "No, not the governor?"

"The president of Italy?" "No, not the President."

"Well then who is it?"

"I think I pulled over Jesus." "Jesus? What makes you think you pulled over Jesus?"

"Because he has the Pope as his chauffeur!"

Last week Jesus taught us that whoever receives a little child receives him.

How we receive the "little ones" around us must reflect the way in which we would receive Jesus himself.

As Jesus said in Matthew's gospel, "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers or sisters, you do to me."

The question you and I are being asked is: "Do we recognize Jesus in the people we meet every day?"

This week's gospel challenges our temptation to judge whether someone is "with us" or "against us".

Our human nature tends to divide people into "us" and "them."

There is a lot of polarization in society. We see it played out in the political arena every day. We also see it within the Church.

Ever since the time of the first Jewish Christians and the Gentile converts there has been arguing about who is "in" and who is "out."

Throughout the history of the Church, Christians have fallen into the trap of emphasizing our differences instead of what we hold in common.

It was only recently, some sixty years ago, that the Catholic Church could declare in the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council:

"Some, even very many, of the most significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church."

While we cannot ignore the differences in belief and practice that exist between Catholics and other Christians, we are challenged to recognize how the grace of the Holy Spirit is at work in all who profess belief in Jesus Christ.

One of the areas where Christians can manifest together the working of the Holy Spirit is the cause of Justice.

Feeding the hungry, visiting the ill, providing shelter to the homeless ...these are just some of the ways we can cooperate to bring the Good News to the marginalized.

Christians can also come together to work for the defense of human life from conception to natural death.

The baby in the womb is the most vulnerable "little one" who needs our common efforts to protect them.

Finally, in today's Gospel Jesus uses strong language to describe the effort it takes to avoid sin.

Of course, he is not suggesting that anyone should literally maim themselves, but there are certainly things we might need to cut ourselves off from in order to avoid temptation.

St. James also uses strong language to warn us about the dangers of riches and of indifference to the plight of the poor.

That image of Pope Francis as Jesus' chauffeur can be symbolic of the humility we all need to have in living out the Gospel imperative to love our neighbors as ourselves.