

**Homily for October 1, 2000  
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**By Father Charles Bowes**

**Numbers 11:25-29**

**James 5:1-6**

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

## *Are we willing to make costly sacrifices to follow Jesus?*

“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off...if your foot...cut it off...if your eye...pluck it out,” says Jesus in Mark chapter 9.

Would you or I cut off an arm to save our life? A man named Doug Goodale would, and did. Early in the morning of the last day of September in 1997, the 32-year-old Maine fisherman headed out on choppy seas from the Wells harbor to check his lobster traps. As the winch on his small boat hauled the first trap to the surface, an unusually large wave caused the rope to tangle in the mechanism, and Doug reached over to turn off the switch. Before he could do so, the winch caught the sleeve of his oil-skin slicker and yanked his hand into the still turning hauler, pitching the lobsterman overboard with his arm still trapped. Somehow he managed to get back aboard, grab the twine knife kept ready for emergencies (though not one like this), and cut part of his own mangled arm away to free it from the winch. He then managed to steer the boat back into the harbor to get help so that he wouldn't bleed to death. “There were no options,” he said later, after the arm had been surgically amputated at the elbow and he'd begun to heal. “I just cut. You'd trade your arm for your life at any moment.” So, cut off the hand? The foot? Pluck out the eye?

Do we need to be reminded about something that should be obvious: when Jesus teaches (or preaches) he sometimes uses hyperbole, such as the blunt direction today, to cut off or cut out members of the body if they are sources or instruments of sin. Well, don't. Don't cut off your hand; the right answer might be to cut down on television. Don't throw out the computer; maintain some sense of proportion and also some awareness of what your children now see. Don't pluck out your eye; find better reading and better films to watch. Why do we waste our time and use our splendid faculties of sense and intelligence on anything but the best?

There is no doubt that Jesus' words are unsettling and are intended to be so. No matter how many times we've heard this passage, it never loses its power to shock. It throws us off balance. It shatters our complacency. It challenges our priorities. While we pay lip service to the superiority of the spiritual dimension, in fact, for most of us, the physical is usually of more immediate interest and importance. The notion of bodily incompleteness is deeply disturbing. Those of us who are able-bodied often avoid contact, even eye contact, with the physically challenged. They are too vivid a reminder of our own fragility, our own mortality. Those of us who are challenged physically often experience discrimination or rejection because we

are signs of the inevitable human incompleteness that the able-bodied would like to deny. Mr. Doug Goodale learned this when some of his neighbors, even one of his own uncles, would turn away as he came down the street so that they wouldn't have to deal with the reality of his physical loss.

No, the injunctions about cutting off one's hand or foot or plucking out one's eye, are not, of course, to be taken literally. The message is not that one should maim oneself in an effort to avoid sin. It is that one must be willing to make costly sacrifices in order to follow the gospel.

Take a moment now and ask the Lord to grant discernment and wisdom as to how to use the gifts we have.

And let us pray: Oh good and gracious God, giver of the gifts we bring, enable us to see clearly, to think wisely and so to touch your world with peace and justice. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

*Are we willing to make costly  
sacrifices to follow Jesus?*