

Scripture Study

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Cycle B



Opening prayer

Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

(Psalm 54:3-4, 5, 6-8)

James 3:16—4:3

Mark 9:30-37

Overview of the Gospel:

- Today's Gospel takes place shortly after Jesus' Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor (Mark 9:2-8), his disclosing to them a mystery about John the Baptist (Mark 9:11-13; see also Malachi 3:23-24; Matthew 17:10-13), and Jesus' casting out of a demon from a young boy (Mark 9:14-29).
- This episode marks the end of his ministry in Galilee. From this point in Mark's Gospel, he will be more intent on making his final journey to Jerusalem and to his death.
- Jesus uses this time for more personal instruction to his disciples to prepare and strengthen them for the coming events that will shake their faith, as he began to tell them in last weeks reading from Mark 8:31-37. The disciples seem to be in a state of denial: even while they hear his words, they are afraid to ask him the hard questions (verse 32).
- Instead, the disciples are focusing, not on his instruction to them in this critical time, but on the petty details of their own agendas (verse 34).
- Jesus takes the opportunity to show them the greatest of them will be the one who: (1) puts himself last, (2) is the servant of all and (3) will receive the seemingly most insignificant person with great love. Such persons should even be regarded as an emissary from God (verse 37)!

Questions:

- Read all of Wisdom, chapter 2, from which our First Reading is taken. How is this a clear prophecy of the events surrounding the events of Our Lord's life? How do the attitudes of the people in that reading and in the Gospel Reading reflect those of some today? How might the attitudes of some of those of James readers (2nd Reading) reflect our own?
- Why do you think the disciples were afraid to question Jesus about his statement of verse 31?
- What was the response of the disciples when Jesus questioned them about their argument? As a disciple, how would you have felt when Jesus asked about the argument?
- How does Jesus' idea of success differ from success as people usually think of it or as usually portrayed by television and movies (see Luke 22:24-27)?
- Children in Jesus' time were considered non-persons—powerless, without legal status, totally dependent on others. Why does Jesus use the child as an object lesson on true greatness in the Kingdom (verses 35-37)? What kind of reward can one expect from serving those who are helpless (see Matthew 25:31-46)? In whose name must the "little child" be received? What kind of person in your life would be that little child? How can one be "first of all" by being "last of all"?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 526, 544, 557, 1825

Closing prayer

Let vanity be unknown among you. Let simplicity and harmony and a guileless attitude weld the community together. Let each remind himself that he is not only subordinate to the brother at his side, but to all. If he knows this, he will truly be a disciple of Christ. --St. Gregory of Nyssa, ca. A.D. 380

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

"If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

Scripture: Mark 9:30-37

30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he would not have any one know it; **31** for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise." **32** But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask him. **33** And they came to Caper'na-um; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" **34** But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest. **35** And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." **36** And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them, **37** "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

Meditation: Whose glory do you seek? There can be no share in God's glory without the cross. When Jesus prophesied his own betrayal and crucifixion, it did not make any sense to his disciples because it did not fit their understanding of what the Messiah came to do. And they were afraid to ask further questions! Like a person who might receive a bad verdict from the doctor and then refuse to ask further questions, they, too, didn't want to know any more. How often do we reject what we do not wish to see? We have heard the good news of God's word and we know the consequences of



accepting it or rejecting it. But do we give it our full allegiance and mold our lives according to it? Ask the Lord to fill you with his Holy Spirit and to inspire within you a reverence for his word and a readiness to obey it.

How ashamed the disciples must have been when Jesus overheard them arguing about who among them was the greatest! But aren't we like the disciples? We compare ourselves with others and desire their praise. The appetite for glory and greatness seems to be inbred in us. Who doesn't cherish the ambition to be "somebody" whom others admire rather than a "nobody"? Even the psalms speak about the glory God has destined for us. *You have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor* (Psalm 8:5). Jesus made a dramatic gesture by embracing a child to show his disciples who really is the greatest in the kingdom of God. What can a little child possibly teach us about greatness? Children in the ancient world had no rights, position, or privileges of their own. They were socially at the "bottom of the rung" and at the service of their parents, much like the household staff and domestic servants. What is the significance

of Jesus' gesture? Jesus elevated a little child in the presence of his disciples by placing the child in a privileged position of honor. It is customary, even today, to seat the guest of honor at the right side of the host. Who is the greatest in God's kingdom? The one who is humble and lowly of heart – who instead of asserting their rights willingly empty themselves of pride and self-seeking glory by taking the lowly position of a servant or child.

Jesus, himself, is our model. He came not to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28). Paul the Apostle states that Jesus emptied himself and took the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). Jesus lowered himself (he whose place is at the right hand of God the Father) and took on our lowly nature that he might raise us up and clothe us in his divine nature. *God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (James 4:6). If we want to be filled with God's life and power, then we need to empty ourselves of everything which stands in the way – pride, self-seeking glory, vanity, etc. God wants empty vessels so he can fill them with his own glory, power, and love (2 Corinthians 4:7). Are you ready to humble yourself and to serve as Jesus did?

"Lord Jesus, by your cross you have redeemed the world and revealed your glory and triumph over sin and death. May I never fail to see your glory and victory in the Cross. Help me to conform my life to your will and to follow in your way of holiness."

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