



***Twenty fifth Sunday Ordinary Time 2006***

***Wisdom 2:12, 17-20 James 3:16-4:3 Mark 9: 30-37***

Today we begin with the second prediction of the passion. Like many things in the biblical tradition, a threefold repetition gives emphasis and dignity to the pronouncement.

Mark places this teaching in the context of a secret journey. There is a suggestion of a time alone with the disciples. The three predictions of the passion are inserted with very little reference to the rest of the narrative almost like the tolling of a bell that is heard in the background.

The predictions are also a reminder to us that Jesus was not surprised by the later events in Jerusalem; he had seen them on the horizon for a great part of his journey. The predictions are each constructed in the same way with Jesus' teaching followed by misunderstanding.

The comment "they were afraid to ask" suggests that an awkwardness had crept over the relationship between Jesus and the disciples. The solemnity of the prediction of the passion is contrasted starkly with the pettiness of the next portion of the narrative.

"What did you talk about on your way home?" The disciples couldn't answer, they couldn't answer we are told, because they were arguing about their various positions in the group. This highlights the complete misunderstanding mentioned earlier. Pain, suffering and rejection will be part of the way of liberation. To seek to re-create the world in the image of a God of justice will not lead to an inflated ego for the saviours but to being trivialised, marginalised and other forms of death.

In the manner of the great prophets, Jesus now uses a concrete sign. He gathers the disciples around him and picks up the child of one of them. He holds the child on his knee while he speaks.

"To rank first is to occupy the last place and to be a servant to the group."

This basic Christian teaching, common to all the Gospels, is one that has not always been honoured. An attitude of servant hood is not one which permits a triumphal attitude, yet much of our history, sad to say, has been about seeing ourselves as religiously better than others. Internal conflict about who is better than, is bad enough, but when it spills into the wider community then the message of Jesus is distorted.

Finally in this passage is the saying of the child. "Whoever receives a child like this in my name receives me. Whoever receives me receives God." The teaching about the attitude of the disciple is extended. In the first part, the disciples are told that a measure of their discipleship is their attitude to power. In the second part, discipleship can be judged on the disciple's attitude to children.

This also includes those who occupy the same vulnerable position in the community that children do. Service to the weak, those society calls insignificant, is the concern of those who would be Christian.

The passage from the letter of James provides an extra reflection on the theme of humility.

The proof of wisdom is humility based on good sense. The writer speaks of a false wisdom which can co-exist with jealousy and selfish ambition.

This is the kind of wisdom which is very popular in our society, "common sense says look out for number one." Divine wisdom has an innocence which is devoid of mixed motives. The virtues which are proper to divine wisdom are peace, lenience, docility, and sympathy.

Such living brings a harvest of kindly deeds marked by impartiality and sincerity. Justice, sown in peace, returns a full harvest.

Bring your heart to peace by removing the cravings which bring conflict in their wake.

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