

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Mark 9:30-37

Jesus and his disciples came from the mountain and began to go through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.

He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

REFLECTION 1:

ACCEPTING JESUS CHRIST

Mother Teresa wisely counselled, ‘Humility is truth; the path that will lead us to be more like Jesus is the path of humility. Humility is the mother of all virtues. By being humble our love becomes real. If you are humble, nothing will harm you, because you know who you are. If you are blamed, you will not be discouraged and if they call you a saint, you will not put yourself on a pedestal!’

As we saw from last week, Mark presents Jesus ‘after leaving the mountain’ as predicting his passion and resurrection and he expects his followers to follow suit, to die and to rise again. Again a misunderstanding follows this announcement, ‘they did not understand the saying and they were afraid to ask him’. And so they remained silent. Their minds could not grasp the possibility of an enemy overcoming him. They were ashamed to admit their slowness of intellect or afraid that Jesus would spell out in detail the truth of an unwelcome forecast. So, the disciples dismissed his disturbing prophecy and became engaged in arguing which of them was the most important and who would hold the principal post in the earthly messianic kingdom which they still expected him to set up. Later we will hear of James and John asking for the top jobs in his kingdom – minister of finance and minister of commerce!

Jesus did not reprove them for their worldliness; he had read their hearts and reminded them that his kingdom would be one of service. The higher their position, the more that person would have to be the servant of others. Now Jesus introduces a child as a model for his followers. They were to be as 'little ones' and whoever accepts his disciples and listens to their message would be accepting Jesus Christ himself. Indeed, not only Jesus, but also his Father who sent him on earth, 'anyone who welcomes you welcomes me and those who welcome me, welcome the one who sent me'. (Matt, Lk. 10; Jn. 13).

Many today in our Western world have abandoned Christianity and yet devote their time, making this planet a better place in which to live. This is an excellent ideal with distinct possibility of success but only if the Fatherhood of God and the true brotherhood/sisterhood of humankind is upheld. Otherwise it is a vain Utopia. If God and Christ's teachings are omitted from the reckoning, we will in the words of James in our second reading today be engaged in 'disorder and foul practice'. (James 3: 11) Christians have made war on Christians because neither side in the struggle was truly Christian. Jesus became man, suffered and died as man for our sakes. By his resurrection he conquered death and gained heaven for us. Heaven is our true destiny. Loving God and neighbour, carrying our cross is the only way. To accept Christ is to accept the Father who sent him and he in turn will accept us.

REFLECTION 2:**'WHO IS THE GREATEST?'**

The story is told that after a major battle during the Napoleonic Wars, Napoleon was observed pinning the croix de guerre (war medal) on the lapels of a long line of soldiers who had displayed bravery during the heat of battle. One of Napoleon's marshals approached the emperor and suggested that he should delegate that honour to a lesser rank as he as head of state should conserve his energies for more important matters, such as planning the next strategy in consultation with his generals. Napoleon declined the invitation remarking, 'Understand my dear marshal, men are ruled by toys'.

We humans crave power. We love titles and rewards and sitting at the head table. The disciples of Jesus were no different. They even went so far as to argue among themselves as to 'who was the greatest?' Who had the power? Who was the top dog? Who had the inside track with Jesus? In all fairness to them, the households in which people at that time were raised were rooted in a hierarchy of power and were distinguished by gender, class and age. Slaves were at the very bottom of the power ladder, followed by the most socially inferior group of all, children. Children were invisible, unannounced. They counted for nothing. Knowing this, imagine the uproar and the shock when Jesus officially answers the disciples' quest as to who was the greatest by telling them that the prize for the greatest among you goes to a child. A child! The least noticeable, the least important now becomes the standard for who is the greatest among us. Jesus not only rocks the boat, he sinks it! He upsets the very structure of their society, turning everything upside down and inside out. And he is still doing it to this present day in the person of Pope Francis and in our own country that of Fr. Peter McVerry.

To emphasize his point, Jesus uses an unmistakeable audio-visual. He takes a child, putting his hand around the boy or girl, dramatizing the heartfelt meaning of his message. This, Jesus is telling us in no uncertain terms, is what true power and genuine authority looks like – in one word, service. Service is the least visible service to the weakest. If you want to be truly great and truly powerful and truly No. 1 in my kingdom, Jesus is telling us today, then use the child as your model. Serve, don't 'lord it over', serve. Don't abuse, exploit or take advantage – serve! Yet, more than 9 million cases of child abuse and exploitation are reported each year worldwide. Children are always vulnerable and easily exploited and the reason remains the same – power is misused for personal gain, power corrupts. But Jesus offers a remedy, turn power into service. Make the last the first. Imagine a world that did that!