

Twenty Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 23, 2018

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading: WIS 2:12, 17-20

The wicked say:

Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law and charges us with violations of our training. Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him. For if the just one be the son of God, God will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes.

With revilement and torture let us put the just one to the test that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience. Let us condemn him to a shameful death; for according to his own words, God will take care of him.

Responsorial Psalm: PS 54:3-4, 5, 6 AND 8

R. (6b) The Lord upholds my life.

O God, by your name save me, and by your might defend my cause. O God, hear my prayer; hearken to the words of my mouth.

R. The Lord upholds my life.

For the haughty men have risen up against me, the ruthless seek my life; they set not God before their eyes.

R. The Lord upholds my life.

Behold, God is my helper; the Lord sustains my life. Freely will I offer you sacrifice; I will praise your name, O LORD, for its goodness.

R. The Lord upholds my life.

Second Reading: JAS 3:16—4:3

Beloved:

Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace.

Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members? You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war. You do not possess because you do not ask. You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Gospel: MK 9:30-37

Jesus and his disciples left from there and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it.

He was teaching his disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise." But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him.

They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, he began to ask them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they remained silent. They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest. Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all."

Taking a child, he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it, he said to them, "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me."

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God...

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

A young newspaper reporter, discussing his priorities and goals during the first year of his professional writing career, stated, "I want to be known as a great writer." At first glance his aspiration seemed like a reasonable dream for a young journalist. However, when asked if his goal was to be a great writer, or to be known as a great writer, he was taken aback. For the first time he had to think about the difference between being something, and receiving recognition. Suddenly the issues of inner motive and the pride of life had to be considered and dealt with in his life.

In this week's Gospel reading we see Jesus pick up on this conflict of motives that surrounds our relationship to others. While, Jesus was preparing these disciples for his imminent arrest, abuse, death, and resurrection, his followers were preoccupied with debating who of them would be the greatest. We shudder to think that there might have been a connection between his talk of crucifixion and their talk of greatness. Surely, they were not anticipating who would replace him, were they?

How we view greatness is a reflection of our acculturation. If our heart and mind have been thoroughly impregnated with the world's wisdom, we cannot help but view greatness as an issue of superiority. Greatness, in the world's mind is always defined in terms of hierarchical position of one person over others. He who is at the highest position would be the one esteemed the greatest, and the higher position would be the one to which we should aspire. But Jesus thoroughly debunks this view of greatness, as he does with so many worldly ideas that easily creep into the mindset of his people.

Jesus turned the world's definition of greatness upside down by personal example and by his words. There was no doubt in the minds of those who observed Jesus that he was unique in his greatness. Even his enemies were aware of this attribute, which is why they so cautiously and consistently tried to tear him down. Yet Jesus' example was one of lowliness, eating with the despised and sinful, speaking to and elevating the view of women, washing the feet of his followers, etc. Greatness in Jesus' mind is a reflection of love and service to others and not one of lording it over others. This reflects also the teaching of Pope John Paul II who saw his crosier with the Crucifix on it not as a symbol of authority per se, but as a "sign of service."* Greatness is not, not thinking highly of yourself, nor is it even thinking lowly of yourself. Greatness is not thinking of yourself at all, but rather thinking of others and how you can serve them.

This concept of greatness reminds me of what happened immediately upon the death of Pope John Paul II. Immediately, banners and chants broke out from the people proclaiming the Holy Father as being "John Paul the Great." Was this ground swell of proclamation due to the fact the John Paul was a learned philosopher and theologian? Many of us did appreciate those gifts in him. We were moved and instructed by his many writings, but I believe people were moved to call him great because they recognized Jesus' greatness in him. His last years of suffering were years of service to Christ and his people. He was not driven by the question of, "What is best for me?" but rather "What is Christ's will?" and "What is best for the Church?" As he in humility bowed his knee to Christ, people young and old, rich and poor, worldly wise and simple recognized a degree of greatness that was made in the image of Christ.

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What is it that stands in the way of our greatness? It is only our ego and desire to be served by others, and to be esteemed by others as superior. Our steps to greatness are hindered by both our desire for greatness and our misunderstanding of its true nature. There is a dearth of greatness in our society, and Jesus is looking for people to be truly great. In most instances true greatness will not be recognized by others, and like the greatness Jesus espoused it will not only not be esteemed but it will usually be despised by the world. But Jesus can, and will recognize it in us for it will be the mirror image of him, and he will esteem and reward it.

* Rise Let Us Be On Our Way, by Pope John Paul II, (page 48).

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

First Reading

1. In what ways, similar to the reading in Wisdom, do you think people test Jesus today?

Second Reading

2. What characteristics of wisdom would you most like to see increased in your life?
3. Why are our prayers sometimes not answered as we would like?

Gospel Reading

4. Why would the disciples be ashamed or afraid to tell Jesus what they were discussing?
5. In light of this passage complete the following statement, "Greatness is ..."
6. What point about greatness is Jesus making with the child?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.