



My Beloved Ones,

An interesting aspect of the Gospel of Mark is how often the Twelve Disciples appear to struggle in understanding their Lord and His salvific mission. In the reading for the Fifth and final Sunday of Great Lent, our Lord begins by very clearly prophesying the coming events of Holy Week: *“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise.”* (Mark 10:33-34) However, after saying these things, James and John, two of Jesus’ inner circle make a request of Him: *“Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”* (Mark 10:37) Even after describing the

events of His Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection, James and John appear most concerned with their possible reward.

Our Lord, demonstrating His ever-lasting patience, corrects them by reinforcing the trials He is about to undergo. *“You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”* (Mark 10:38) Having given the brothers the nickname “Sons of Thunder”, it is not surprising that James and John answer Him pridefully; yes, they are able. Though Jesus calmly explains that they *will* share in the cup that He is soon to accept in Gethsemane; and that they *will* each become different kinds of witnesses for the faith, *“...to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”* (Mark 10:40). Naturally, the other Disciples are not pleased by this answer, and so they argue among themselves—but look: Jesus uses this moment of human weakness an opportunity for a lesson concerning servitude.

*“You know,”* he explains, *“that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.”* (Mark 10:42-44) This is a great paradox, and indeed, for those Disciples who, like James and John, still believed that their coming into Jerusalem was to be a revolution, it was shocking. How could the Messiah support servitude?

Jesus, understanding His relationship to the Father, and His Incarnation as the God-Man wishes to demonstrate once more the importance of humility. Just as He will wash their feet on Holy Thursday, He explains that “...*the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” This is indeed a very beautiful reflection concerning our Lord’s love for His Creation, but it is also a very difficult passage. All of humanity struggles with that aspect of ourselves that scientists refer to as the ego; and while this ego can be helpful in allowing us to focus on the things we need to survive and live, too much ego means that we think only of ourselves. It is for this reason that James and John are concerned with their positions; and this why the other Disciples grumble against them. Christ means to shock them out of their self-love, by reminding them that He came to serve others, and that the same is expected of all those who would call themselves His followers.

My Beloved, this passage is filled with signs of the Praetorium, Golgotha, and the Tomb on the third day. As we continue walking alongside our Lord and His Disciples to Jerusalem, let us also take the message to heart that the God is love; not the love we have for our spouses, children, or friends, but a truly self-emptying love; a kind of love that is very difficult for frail humans to regularly attain. Thankfully, with the help of our Creator, and through prayer and fasting, we too can experience this Christ-like love which seeks, not to serve ourselves, but our brothers and sisters.

**+ALEXIOS**

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