

2021 September 19

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings:

First: Wisdom 2.12, 17-20 "If the righteous one is God's son, God will help him, and will deliver him." (18)

The Psalm: 54, "God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life." (4)

Second: James 3.16-4.3 "The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield." (3.17a)

The Gospel: Mark 9.30-37, "Whoever wants to be first must be the last of all and servant of all." (35)

Be the last to wins

Jesus and James have hard lessons for us today. Jesus is more than half way through his earthly mission and slowly revealing to his disciples for the second time in private that his end would be a torturous death. He also tells them that he would be raised up after being killed. The disciples do understand what death is, but they could not easily believe that their Master the Messiah could die. Resurrection was totally an unintelligible concept for them.

Since Jesus was repeatedly giving this message in private to them they figured out that everything was not going to be good for him. Besides, they get the pulse of the powerful religious leaders of the time who were on the look out to do away with Jesus. They also observed that Jesus started avoiding the main streets, and moved through the bylines and country side, away from the sight of these leaders. The disciples probably were in private consultation among themselves: if Jesus' life were not to be safe theirs could also be risky. Once Jesus is gone where would they go and who would be their leader? There were some among them 'quite capable' and confident of themselves. We later find James and John requesting Jesus to be the first and the second in the clan, in command!

Jesus knew their thoughts. Hence, he casually takes up the issue and presents his design for leadership. *'The one aspiring to be the first should be the last and servant of all. You cannot begin as a master. Begin by serving first and slowly and laboriously step forward to the first position.'* Some among them could not swallow this teaching. You know, some are born to lead, and only to lead, and never be led and to serve! They want the crown without the cross, victory without a fight. They want to swim without stepping into water! To them today's teaching of Jesus and his design for saving the world by offering himself in sacrifice are 'foolishness'. We have met Peter standing on the way of suffering and death that Jesus chose, and prompting him to look for a plan B!

The conspirators in the book of Wisdom today have their short-cut to success, namely, eliminate the righteous from their way, those that are inconvenient for their designs. The teaching of St. James in his letter today reminds us of the teaching of Jesus to choose to be the last to move to the first, and to die in order to live. James continues to teach that it is the selfish ambition that leads us to wickedness resulting in disorder. Wisdom for James is *"first to be pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy."* (James 3.17) He concludes that covetous inner cravings lead us to conflict with one another, and to all kinds of evil including murder. There hardly is a shortcut to the kingdom. The way of Jesus, the way to the kingdom is the way of the Cross!