

Praying the Sunday Gospel

29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 17, 2021

Mark 10:35-45

### Background on the Gospel

Jesus is nearing the end of his journey to Jerusalem where he will face rejection and death, the beginning of a process that will also lead to resurrection. He has just given the disciples the 3<sup>rd</sup> (of 3) passion predictions, again, they do not understand what he has explained and seem to ignore it. Nonetheless Jesus “goes ahead” of them and they follow him: “spatially,” they are disciples, but clearly not yet fully committed.

Nothing can more dramatically demonstrate their blindness than the question/request/demand of 2 of his closest disciples, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Since he is approaching Jerusalem they fantasize that he is going to claim his throne as Messiah. When they ask for seats at his right and left, Jesus does not totally ignore their request but tries yet again to teach them what lies ahead is suffering, not glory. He questions their “spiritual stamina” – can they drink his cup and share his Baptism?

“Cup” here means sharing a destiny; cup can be positive or negative, a cup of victory or cup/sharing of pain, rejection and suffering. Baptism here is not the sacrament but the process of total immersion in waters that are overwhelming, waters of death and destruction, loss of “self.” This was a Biblical image.

Without really reflecting on the significance of what they are saying, the two answer quickly and boldly that they are ready to handle whatever cup or baptism might mean. Jesus acknowledges they will indeed suffer like him and for him but he cannot promise “places of honor.” In fact, he himself is simply moving toward death without any expectation of future glory. He is totally trusting in the Father’s care.

Finally, the other 10 express anger at James and John. Jesus challenges all of them to recognize how they all fail to understand his sense of authority and power as radical service. He has come to serve, not to be served, to give his life as a ransom for the many. Ransom is the price paid for the release of prisoner; Christ explains he has come to free us from all that “enslaves” us, especially death. “Many” here is probably a reference to Isaiah 53:11 and should be understood inclusively, not exclusively – that is, “many” means “all” who are open/accepting of the offer of salvation. “Many” is used instead of “all” so as to leave room for our free choice to accept the Lord’s ransom.

### Points for Prayer and Reflection

1. An important part of genuine prayer is openness to change, specifically being willing to let go of my own instinctive desires for control/safety/comfort and entrust myself to the Lord. James and John were pretty sure they knew exactly

what they wanted but obviously they were wrong! Talk to Jesus about what you think he might want for you. Ask for the courage and trust to let go of your own “agenda.”

2. Meditate on the images of “Cup” and “Baptism” – challenging experiences of physical and psychological pain but embraced with joy because they are privileged means for communion with Jesus. As you pray about this experience of communion, remember it means communion with the whole Body of Christ – that is all people who are suffering in body or spirit as well as those rejoicing and experiencing peace.
3. Reflect on the anger of the other 10 disciples at the boldness of James and John. Pray for the healing of any way you tend to compare yourself with others and feelings of jealousy or anger at their success when you perhaps got “sidelined.”
4. Christ said he came as our ransom, to “pay the price” so that we could know/experience complete freedom from sin, fear and death. From what do you need to be freed at this time? Ask for that gift and remember freedom also brings responsibility: how will you “use” the freedom Jesus is offering you? Pray also for people you can know who are afraid of spiritual freedom and cling to obsessive habits and addictions.
5. Jesus died “for the many”; consider his love for all people, yes, even people you do not like, people who have hurt you, people who have done evil. Pray that they might awaken to his great love. Pray that you can let go of your own prejudice against them. And remember to pray for those whom you have caused to suffer psychological stress.