

September 23 – 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

*Whom Do You Serve?*

This is a memory test!

Do you recall your high school geometry class?

Yes, I know that might be a long, long time ago.

Here's the test: "What does this symbol mean?"

[show the sign // ... which means "parallel"]

Yes, it is parallel, like two railroad rails, like two pews here in church ... going in the same direction without crossing over each other.

Today's scripture readings have some very interesting parallels in them!

Since Vatican II, about 50 years ago, the Church has been encouraging us to get a broader and deeper sense of the Bible, Sacred Scriptures.

The Church decided to use four Scriptures each Sunday -

First Reading; Psalm; Second Reading; Gospel.

The Church also gave us a different set of readings over three years.

That gives us 624 different Sunday Scripture readings in three years.

When I was a child we only had 156 different Sunday Scripture readings and they repeated year after year.

Now, each year our Sunday Scriptures concentrate on one of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke with the Gospel of John intermixed.

We are currently in the year of Mark's Gospel.

The Church also decided to use an Old Testament reading for the First Reading and to have that reading tie in with the Gospel.

Ah Ha! There's where "parallel" comes into play!

In today's Gospel Jesus tries to explain to the Apostles that he was going to be killed and rise again.

The Apostles just don't get his point at all!  
Our First Reading from the Book of Wisdom is a parallel to that Gospel.

The reading comes from King Solomon who lived almost 1000 years before Christ.

King Solomon speaks about how the unjust people gang up on a just person.

***"Let us condemn him to a shameful death;***

***For according to his own words, God will take care of him."***

Yes, that's a parallel to our Gospel and points us to Good Friday when Jesus was crucified ... by the unjust ... for us!

Speaking of parallels, today's psalm also ties in with the Gospel.

***"For the ruthless men have risen up against me,***

***The ruthless seek my life;***

***They set not God before their eyes."***

Does this also tie in with Jesus and the crucifixion?

Well, this psalm is used in the Liturgy of the Hours on Good Friday.

"Well, how does the Second Reading parallel all this?"

I would use a different word to describe the Second Reading ... not "parallel" but "contrast".

James describes the contrast between the just and the unjust, between the righteous and the unrighteous.

He lists some of the problems with the unjust as:

- Jealousy
- Selfish ambition
- Passions
- Coveting
- Killing
- Envy
- Fighting and wars

In contrast he lists things that come when we follow wisdom and justice:

- Purity
- Peace
- Gentleness
- Compliance
- Mercy and
- Sincerity

Besides "parallels" and "contrasts" there is a really key point in today's Gospel... Jesus' comments about being the servant to the child. The topic is "nice" but there is an added issue to address, namely, the issue of Middle Eastern culture at that time.

While Western cultures tend to place children first and risk everything to save the child above all, ancient Middle Eastern cultures would place the child last.

A minor child was considered equal with a slave.

Listening again to Jesus words:

***"If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all."***

Then, with his arms around the child Jesus says:

***"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."***

As one Scripture commentator has put it, it is as if we are a waiter at a restaurant asking a child for their order.

But, let's take it further.

Some possible situations:

1. Fr. Don asks us to do something and we say, "Sure, Father!"
2. A friend asks us to do something and we say "OK, buddy."

3. A person in need,
  - a. a person we just met recently
  - b. a person we can't quite understand
  - c. a person who has no way to repay us,
  - d. a person who asks for something quite hard to do
  - e. is that who Jesus is telling us to serve?
  - f. Can we adjust to that?
  - g. Can we make time for it?

Can we say "If you say so, Lord?"

Servant! ... yes, that is the bottom line!

Parallels.

Contrasts.

A request from Jesus.