

Twenty Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2009

When we watch television, listen to the radio or read the newspapers, we are confronted every day with all sorts of crimes that are perpetrated in our country and all over the world. The cause of most of these crimes is the evil that is growing in the human heart. All the readings of this Sunday invite us to reflect on the reality of evil that is in the world and on how we can stand against its effects by following God's wisdom.

The first reading describes the behavior and the plan of the wicked ones whose mind is completely consumed with evil. Along the day, the wicked do not stop thinking of how they can harm and destroy the just. They continually try to mount traps and raise obstacles in the ways of the just in order to put him to test. They speak of the just with dismay and belittle his faith and trust in God.

What pushes the wicked to act in such a way toward the just ones is their ignorance of God's wisdom and their embedment in evil strategies. God's wisdom, on the contrary, leads to peace and tolerance; it rejoices for the good of others; it strives for purity of heart and mercy; it encourages sincerity and the love of truth. To work for peace and promote it; to purify our hearts before God and our fellows; to live in sincerity and truth with ourselves is to claim that we belong to God as his beloved children.

Because God's wisdom is important in order to live in peace with others, St James warns us against jealousy, selfish ambition and envy that lead to conflicts and wars among humans. Things like disorder, foul practice, inconsistency, insincerity, instead of bringing people together, set them apart. Instead of producing peace, they produce strife. Instead of building human relationships, they destroy them. To disturb personal relationships and to be responsible for strife and bitterness can only put us against God's ways.

It is for that reason that St James insists on the importance of submitting ourselves to the will of God instead of gratifying the desires for the pleasures of this world. He warns us that if we make pleasure the dominant theme of our life, nothing but strife, bitterness, hatred and division will follow. Desire for the pleasures of this world is always a threatening danger to our spiritual growth and our spiritual life. The ultimate choice in life is between pleasing ourselves or pleasing God. When we choose rather to please ourselves, we open the door to conflicts, division and wars.

As human experience has taught us, when people are striving to possess the same things, life becomes inevitably a fiery competitive arena. In the end, they step on the toes of one another. They trample each other down in order to grasp what they want, and eventually they will eliminate each other.

This statement does not mean we cannot compete or that we cannot encourage emulation or competition. It is all about the motivation that drives us, whether it is selfish desires that lead to rivalry or a search for the will of God in our undertakings. The truth St James brings to us is that the pursuit of selfish desires shuts the door to a true prayer before God. We cannot make our passion an object of prayer. We cannot beseech God to satisfy whims and selfish desires.

If our prayer is only guided by desires and pleasures, it is essentially selfish, and, therefore, cannot please God. The true end of prayer is to say to God: "Thy will be done" rather than "My desires be satisfied".

All that helps understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus confronts his disciples who are consumed with self ambition and a search for prestige. For Jesus, human greatness does not lie in unmeasured ambitions, but in our service of others. That is why he brings a child in the midst of his disciples in order to teach them the true value of God's kingdom. What Jesus says here is true today as it was in the past. The example of a child teaches us that without imitating children's purity of heart, their sincerity and their lack of self ambition, we will be counted as the least in the kingdom of God.

When people are consumed with self ambition and self esteem, they lose the meaning of life; they spend all their time by focusing on what is not essential to life. For Jesus, anyone looking for greatness in God's kingdom must find it, not by being the first but being the last, not by being master but being servant of all.

That is why what Jesus was saying about his passion and death was more important than the discussion of knowing who was the greatest among them. The disciples did not understand him and yet, they, too, had to be prepared to go through suffering..

Once again, it does not mean that Jesus abolishes human ambition; rather he puts it in a right spot that leads to God's kingdom. Instead of the ambition to rule, he proposes the ambition to serve. Instead of the ambition to have things done for us, he proposes the ambition to do things for others.

After all, great people who are remembered as having made a real contribution to life and in the world are not those who used the state and society to further their own prestige and personal ambitions, but rather those who asked themselves how they could use their gifts and talents to serve the state and society.

By reacting to the disciples' discussion over position and by proposing to them a child as model, Jesus would like to tell us that the Church is a community of brotherhood and sisterhood. It is not a civil society where honorific titles count more than ever. If there are titles in the Church, it is for human respect and rank, but not for any privilege before God.

By placing a child in the midst of his disciples, Jesus would like to tell us also that Christian community is not a place to gain prestige, to rise above others or to impose one's will. It is a place where, according to the gifts received from God, all the members celebrate together and live their greatness by serving each other as brothers and sisters.

This insight is what our catechists we commission today should have in mind. To be catechist is to become of channel of God's words to our brothers and sisters. It is a service and not privilege. We ask the Lord to bless all our catechists and fill them with the spirit of service. We ask him to help us welcome the wisdom he has brought us through his Son Jesus so that we might serve our brothers and sisters instead of being served. May God bless you all!

Wisdom 2, 12, 17-20; James 3, 16-4, 3; Mark 9, 30-37



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