

## **Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2012**

The readings of this Sunday talk about the reality of evil and its presence in the world and in the people. They invite us to reflect on the mechanism that leads to evil and to dispose ourselves to follow God's guidance.

In the first reading, the book of Wisdom describes the mind and the behavior of the wicked. Instead of living in peace with himself and with others, he continually plans how he can destroy the just and put the traps before him. His entire plan is to do evil and never to do good. What counts most for him is to find an opportunity to accuse the just and to challenge his righteousness.

What is behind this text is the idea that the mind of the wicked is full of mischief and malice. Another idea is the truth that the just man is continually an object of envy and jealousy from the wicked who wants to test him because of his righteousness and his faithfulness to God.

That is the reason why St James warns us in the second reading against the effects of jealousy, selfish ambition and envy that lead to conflicts and wars among people. Such things, instead of bringing people together and building strong relationships among them, they rather destroy them. They even distort the relationship with God, because anything done with selfishness and worldly passion becomes an obstacle to true prayer before God.

This text helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus confronts his disciples who are all consumed with self ambition and a search for prestige. First of all, the Gospel relates that while Jesus and his disciples were traveling through Galilee, he did not want people to know about it. The Gospel says also that at that time, Jesus started talking about his passion, death and resurrection, but the disciples did not understand anything about it and were even afraid to question him.

Once they came in the region of Capernaum and entered the house, Jesus questioned his disciples about the discussion they had along the way. Unfortunately, they could not say any word, because they were discussing in order to know who among them was the greatest.

Taking advantage of the situation, Jesus reminded them that anyone willing to be the first among them should be the last of all and the servant of all. As to link word to action, he put a child in their midst and reminded them that to receive a child like that is to receive him and, by the same token, to receive the one who sent him.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing we learn is about the suffering Messiah. Up to now Jesus has enjoyed relative calm and success in his teaching and ministry. Suddenly, he starts speaking about his passion, death and resurrection. That was a little bit shocking for the disciples, as well as for the Jews who heard him, because of the divergent conception they had about the Messiah.

In Jewish tradition, indeed, there were two strong conceptions about the Messiah. The foundation of the first conception was God's promise to protect and restore the Davidic Dynasty. The Messiah was believed to come and restore Israel in its right with a strong reign against its enemy. Even at the time of the prophets, there was always a conviction

that God will not fail to fulfill his promise to raise a king who will act and lead the country as David did. In that perspective, the ideal was mostly national.

The second conception was linked to the apocalyptic vision and was eschatological. In this conception, the Messiah will come when the day of the Lord will be fulfilled. The Messiah will proceed to the restoration of Israel and the resurrection of the dead. The Messiah was not believed to come as a human prince, but as the descent of God in order to judge the world. But, in none of these conceptions, there was a question of Messiah as suffering or dying. On the contrary, he had to triumph over all his enemies and reign forever.

In such a context, when Jesus brought the question of his suffering and death, it was difficult for the disciples to understand him. That would have been something unusual and unexpected of the Messiah.

In truth, Jesus' conception of Messiah fulfills and transcends all the conflicting messianic hopes of Israel and all the vision of the prophets. He was the suffering servant of God and Davidic King, the judge of mankind and its savior at the same time. He was born in order to give his life on the cross for the salvation of the world.

In that sense, the cross stands in his life as a necessary path through which he has to walk. That is why there is no resurrection without the cross. As it was for Jesus, so it is for us today. In order to share in the resurrection of Jesus, we have to accept the cross.

The second thing I want to highlight is about the grandeur through service. The search for social rank, prestige and honor, is all human. As human beings, Jesus' disciples did not escape such temptation. However, that way cannot connect us to Jesus and his kingdom. The values of God's kingdom obey different criteria than those of the world.

That is what Jesus wanted to put in the mind of his disciples and in us alike. True greatness is not in the search for honor and prestige, but in humbly serving our fellows. As Jesus says, anyone willing to be first or the greatest should be the last and the servant of others. A child is an example given to each one of us to imitate children's purity of heart, lack of self ambition and dependence on those who provide for them.

By proposing us a child as a model, Jesus does not kill our ambitions; rather he teaches us that instead of the ambition to rule, we better serve; instead of willing people to do things for us, we better do for them. That is our duty and our dignity as his disciples.

Let us pray, then, that the Lord may bring us to serve one another as he has served us with humility. Let us pray that in everything we do we may have just one ambition, namely serving others for the glory of God and their wellbeing. May the Holy Spirit guide us so that we avoid evil and pursue good! May God bless you all!

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



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