

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time B2021

The readings of this Sunday talk about the reality of evil. They show that evil exists in the world as well as in the people. They warn us against the mechanism that leads to evil and invite us to live under God's rules.

The first reading describes the mind and the behavior of the wicked person. It shows that instead of living in peace with others, the wicked person plans continually to destroy the just man by putting traps in his way. It also shows how his intentions are always malicious toward the just man.

What is behind this text is the idea that the mind of the wicked person is full of mischief and malice. Another idea is that the just man is continually an object of envy and jealousy. The last idea is related to the truth that the wicked person, in his meanness, takes pleasure in testing and challenging the just man.

This text helps us understand the point of today's Gospel as Jesus invites his disciples to humility and service. First of all, the Gospel describes the trip of Jesus to Galilee and the secrecy he wanted about it. The Gospel talks also about Jesus' announcement of his passion, death and resurrection. Then, it speaks of the disciples' misunderstanding of Jesus' speech.

After that, the Gospel speaks about Jesus' arrival in Capernaum and his question toward the disciples about their discussion underway. Then, it reports on Jesus invitation of his disciples to humility and the service of one another. The Gospel ends up with Jesus putting a child in the midst of his disciples and his injunction that they imitate him.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk 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 would 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 was there question of the 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.

By accepting to go through passion, death and resurrection, Jesus gave an example of humility, obedience to the Father and self-abasement. In that sense, he shows that the criteria of the kingdom of God are different in comparison to those of the world. In the same way, true greatness is not in the search for honor, social rank or prestige, but in humbly serving our fellows. That is the reason why Jesus put a child in the midst of the disciples in order to instruct them.

And yet, we know what a child represents, namely the purity of heart, the lack of self-ambition, the dependence on those who provide for him. That is why Jesus says that anyone willing to be first or the greatest should be the last and the servant of others.

In that sense, it becomes clear that by proposing a child as a model, Jesus does not kill human ambitions; but 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.

We must become great through humble, self-giving service. Greatness, in Jesus' view, is found in our willingness to accept, welcome, and serve those who are considered unacceptable by reason of class, color of skin, religion, wealth or culture. We must welcome people the way a child welcomes them before he is taught discrimination and fear of others.

If we want to be truly great, we must be ready to accept four challenges: (1) to put ourselves last, (2) to be the servant of all, (3) to receive the most insignificant human beings with love, and (4) to expect nothing in return.

During this Mass, let us pray 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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