

September 18, 1994

Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

"Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions; he reproaches us for sins against the law, and accuses us of sins against our training.

Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life; for if the righteous man is God's child, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries. Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance. Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected.

James 3:16 - 4:3

For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace. Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

Mark 9:30-37

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When have you tried to point out something unjust and found out that evil can't stand to be reprimanded?
2. What happens to leaders when they forget that greatness is measured by service?
3. How have you served people today? How does your motivation affect both you and the people you serve?

Katie Radford and Diane Banks □

## Which one is the greatest?

### THE GOOD NEWS

GOD'S WORD ON EVERYDAY LIVING

By Father Paul Turner



ONE OF THE COZIEST images we have of Jesus is him throwing his arms around the child in the Gospel for next Sunday (Mk 9:30-37). In many paintings and mental images we see a smiling Jesus, the God who cares for every one of us. It makes us feel like a child before the God we so often call Father, and trust that everything's going to be all right.

All that's true, but taken in the context of the full reading, this is one of the darkest moments the disciples face. Far from a comforting Jesus, they meet a very threatening one when he puts that child in their midst.

This episode opens with a conversation between Jesus and the disciples. He's instructing them about his passion, death and resurrection. But the disciples don't understand. They imagine future glory will come from triumph, not humiliation. Perhaps remembering how brazenly Jesus scolded Peter when he spoke up in protest to this teaching, the disciples say nothing. They do not understand, and they're not asking any questions. They're afraid to get it wrong. They're afraid to understand more. Jesus gives this instruction several times in hopes that they'll get it right.

THOSE HOPES are dashed as they continue their journey. In this half of Mark's Gospel, the journey theme dominates. Peter proclaimed Jesus the Messiah at Caesarea Philippi, way up in the north of Israel. Now Jesus travels south toward Jerusalem. He is "on the way" — the way of Christianity, and the way of the cross.

They arrive in Capernaum and Jesus takes a break with his friends. Capernaum witnessed miracles near the beginning of Jesus' ministry. It plays host to Jesus now at the end of his ministry.

Silent before Jesus when he talked about his death, the disciples babbled on the road to Capernaum. Jesus idly asks what they were talking about. Even the disciples realize they blew it. They were talking about which one of them was the greatest. The greatest! On the road to Jesus' funeral, this is what they're talking about. The conversations of men turned to competition in first-century Galilee.

Exasperated, Jesus tries once more to teach them the lesson of his passion and death. He sits down, assuming a position of authority characteristic of teachers. Then he bluffs. He calls the Twelve, making everyone think he will solve the riddle of who was the greatest. Since the group making the journey was larger than the Twelve, by singling out these apostles, Jesus creates suspense. Who is the greatest? Will it be Peter, the natural leader? John, the one Jesus loved? A dark horse?

A real dark horse. Jesus sets a child in their midst. Every good catechist knows nothing teaches like a visual aid. A child represents humility, helplessness, dependency, and lowliness. A citizen having no rights, the child is hardly an example of greatness. Yet Jesus says this is the model. If you become like children, and if you care for them, you too can be great.

JESUS COMPLETELY reverses the expectations people have of greatness. It's like telling professional ball-players that greatness comes in accepting minimum wage for the privilege of playing the national sport. It just doesn't connect with the society's understanding.

So that image of Jesus embracing a child is ominous. It's one more attempt he's making to tell his disciples that greatness will come from helplessness. There we will find strength in the power of God.

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