

Homily for the 25th Sunday of the Year

None of us like to be caught out, and when we are the temptation is to seek a way out, by, for example, putting the blame elsewhere, rather than acknowledging that on this occasion we made the wrong choice. St James, in the second reading for today, makes a very strong point about accepting responsibility when things go wrong. He writes, “Where do those wars and battles between yourselves first start? Isn’t it precisely in the desires fighting inside your own lives?” Envy, greed and ambition are at the heart of a lot of our troubles, and these are the emotions that bind someone to the world rather than to God. James was writing to the Christians of the first century but he could also be writing to us today, and we could do worse than to reflect on today’s scripture through his lens.

His letter, at one level a very practical one as we have heard over the last couple of weeks, also resembles the Wisdom Literature from which the first reading was taken. In this passage there is a contrast between the godless and the virtuous. When the godless realise that someone is critical of their way of life, especially their ambition and greed, they want to silence them by any and every means possible, so that they will have a free reign to do whatever they wish. And we think of how some people today, who should know better, use their influence or power to silence those who oppose them. This can happen in families, in schools, within the Church. In more extreme cases critics are imprisoned and tortured, others simply disappear, they really are being, in the words of St James, tested with cruelty.

In the gospel passage Jesus is now alone with the disciples. The crowds have gone and it is his opportunity to spend some quality time with them and to help them to grasp more fully what he had told them in last week’s passage, namely that he was to be handed over, to suffer and die, and to rise again. There is no further explanation, instead Mark writes, ‘But they did not understand what he said and were afraid to ask him.’ Why were they afraid? Mark doesn’t tell us, but perhaps it was because they really didn’t want to face up to what Jesus said was going to happen to him, and to them. In any event however they heard what Jesus said, it didn’t seem to have had much effect because they were discussing status and in particular who was the greatest. The contrast couldn’t have been greater and their discussion is further evidence that they still have much to learn about the nature of Jesus and his mission.

If envy demands a better position, if greed desires wealth, and if ambition seeks power, then Jesus’ life and ministry, and indeed his death and teaching contradict all three. In a massive reversal of what would have been regarded as the norm Jesus says the first must make themselves last of all and servant of all. This is to set aside the values of the world, and to embrace the values of the kingdom. If they and we are to be true disciples of Jesus, we are to set aside envy, greed and ambition and open ourselves to following him who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Bidding Prayers for 25th Sunday of the Year

Celebrant:

O God hear my prayer; listen to the words of my mouth. With these words of the psalmist in our minds and hearts we turn to God in prayer.

Reader:

For the Church – that all those in positions of responsibility will hear and put into practice Jesus call for leaders to be servants.

Lord in your mercy

For world leaders – that they will always put the needs of the people they serve before personal ambition.

Lord in your mercy

This coming Tuesday is the International Day of Peace – may all people, especially those facing violence, prejudice, hatred or any form of discrimination, experience peace in their lives.

Lord in your mercy

For all those involved in working for human rights throughout the world – that their voices will be heard and people's rights upheld.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the Covid 19 pandemic, and Sarah Stanton, Louise Halliwell, Leonard Holt, Phyllis Bayley, Joan Bradbury, Mary Cahill and Andrew Lohan whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

All loving God, your Son foretold his passion and death to his disciples as your journeyed on the road and explained to them the true nature of leadership. Help us to hear his voice as we serve one another during this coming week. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen