

## September 23, 2018

Ws 2:12, 17-20; Jas 3:16-4:3; Mk 9:30-37

We are trained to think that being the one on top and in charge, that progress up the social and economic ladder is what brings fulfillment and contentment. That certainly was what the Apostles in the Gospel today were thinking. They were looking at each other and trying to figure who was the most important. This sounds familiar ... because we do it all the time. We look at those around us and see how we measure up, and sometimes try to feel better about ourselves because we judge ourselves to be above others. The problem is that the way we judge who is better is not always the way God judges.

I know a lot of teenagers and men who have coped with their feelings of weakness, or their perceptions of being wronged, or their needs to look to others like they are strong and powerful by doing things that have either hurt or killed another. Emotions can make us lash out - either verbally, in writing or on the internet, or by physical aggression - and such things cause emotional or physical pain and set up divisions. What is the worst is when we use these tactics inside of our own families or in the family of the Church. James cautions against this in the second reading: *Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members?* Our passions - that is our emotions and desires - and our needs to be sure “no one is going to push us around,” can lead us into conflict with those who should be as close to us as the limbs (members) of our body. We live today in a culture that teaches that the way to deal with being wronged is that the one who upset me must suffer for it, that they can never be forgiven, that I can only be whole again when I have witnessed those who have wronged me being hurt, discredited, or removed from view. But this is us passing judgement on another based upon our own subjective standards (or those that have been given to us by a secular culture) ... what does Jesus say about these situations?

We hear Jesus tell us that *If anyone wishes to be first, [they] shall be the last of all and the servant of all.* This tells us of what position to take. Not feeling entitled to be the one on top, not feeling entitled to have our needs and ego served, but to take the attitude of a servant to all. Jesus shows us how to do this in allowing himself to be unjustly tried - while being misunderstood and lied about. Although he could have used his power to “show them who was boss” - he reminds Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane that if he wanted to he could call down

legions of angels to defend him - he allows the situation to continue and serves us as he wins heaven for us through that suffering.

Another problem with getting into an attitude of judging and justifying and trying to get even without love and forgiveness is how we pick and choose who we pay attention to. When we want to be high up we have to favor the people who can help us to get there - and push aside those who don't advance our agenda. Look and see how much this happens, look and see how we focus our attention on those who boost our pride or who help us to get what we want - others get much less attention ... even if they need it. The more we use the world's way to elevate ourselves, the less we rely on God as well (after all who needs God when I've got all these great plans of how I am going to get it to work out my way). We can even begin to buy the rhetoric that there is no God there ... but there is. But we may want to push God out to press our own plan that follows a doctrine of revenge and selfishness and not Jesus' doctrine of healing and forgiveness. In the end, God takes a step back and we miss not only a chance to see the power of God resolve a situation, but we watch our short-term gains erode in the long run into more suffering and pain.

Jesus reminds us today - by bringing the child into the midst of the disciples - that we must welcome those who are low in the world's eyes, even if they don't fit into our own grand plans. We must trust that as we move to be the servant of all that God will one day even things out for our being wronged. We heard in the first reading: *For if the just one be the son of God, God will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes.* This prophecy refers to Jesus who came to serve, who did not focus on revenge towards his enemies, who was able to triumph over the worst that was thrown at him when he rose from the dead by the power of God. This prophecy can also apply to those who join themselves to the body of Jesus - as we have the chance to do in this Eucharist. Then we can accept not a worldly agenda of equalizing things by our own power, but can accept the power of God to make things ultimately triumph in the end. There is nothing that can be done to us that God cannot turn around. As we seek to serve and not to dominate we bring Jesus into the situation and with him ... the power of God.