

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 20, 2009 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

The wicked say: Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law and charges us with violations of our training. Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him. For if the just one be the son of God, God will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes. With revilement and torture let us put the just one to the test that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience. Let us condemn him to a shameful death; for according to his own words, God will take care of him.

Psalm: Ps 54:3-4, 5, 6-8

R. (6b) The Lord upholds my life.

O God, by your name save me,
and by your might defend my cause.
O God, hear my prayer;
hearken to the words of my mouth.

R. The Lord upholds my life.

For the haughty men have risen up against me,
the ruthless seek my life;
they set not God before their eyes.

R. The Lord upholds my life.

Behold, God is my helper;
the Lord sustains my life.
Freely will I offer you sacrifice;
I will praise your name, O LORD, for its
goodness.

R. The Lord upholds my life.

Scripture Reading: James 3:16-4:3

Beloved: Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace.

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? You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war. You do not possess because you do not ask. You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Gospel: Mark 9:30-37

Jesus and his disciples left from there and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it. He was teaching his disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise." But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him.

They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, he began to ask them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they remained silent. They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest. Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all." Taking a child, he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it, he said to them, "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me."



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the gospel be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

“Will this be on the test?” Such a question grates on the nerves of dedicated teachers who are trying to help students truly learn. It indicates that, rather than grasping the essence of the lesson, the student is focused instead on her or his standing among classmates or on other immediate, self-centered concerns. In a similar way, Jesus must have felt frustrated after learning of the disciples’ discussion over which one will be considered the greatest. Although it might have been tempting to do so, Jesus does not rebuke them. Instead he places in their midst a child – symbol of vulnerability, dependency, and a lack of status or power. In doing so, he invites the disciples to receive those who are humble, unassuming, unexpected, and unlikely to be the ones they’d consider capable of embracing his teachings. It is a touching, warm, and, no doubt, surprising scene, one meant to help the disciples visualize his message more clearly.

The child stands, too, for openness and for an ability to ask difficult questions. After hearing an admittedly difficult teaching from Jesus about his death and Resurrection, the disciples are afraid to ask him anything. While the little child might not have been held back by his or her lack of understanding, the disciples are. Discussing status and prestige is a much safer topic. To learn from Jesus, the great teacher, we must lay aside our own ambitions, our fears, and sometimes even our own dreams. The Paschal Mystery is central to our Christian belief. Understanding it takes a lifetime and beyond. Opening ourselves to it takes courage and humility. Ultimately, it leads us, not to questions of greatness, but to ones of faith, commitment, and self-effacing love. It is a lesson about dying, one that is hard to hear and understand. For those who are open to receiving it, it is also about life itself, one that will yield the greatest rewards imaginable.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Who are the children in our midst today – those who represent vulnerability, dependence, and lack of power or influence? How are they more open than most to the message of Christ?
2. How are we missing the message of Jesus today? What things sideline our understanding of his teachings?
3. What teachings of Jesus frighten me? Why?
4. How can I be more open to the Paschal Mystery on a daily basis?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations. The following are secondary suggestions:

1. Name one area in your life in which you would like to be more open to serving others. Take steps to do so.
2. Determine how you can be more attentive to the teachings of Jesus in your daily life. Follow this practice faithfully each day of the coming week.
3. Consider how you can give your time and talent more intentionally to helping those who are powerless, vulnerable, or dependent on others for their well-being and safety. This might be through a social justice or outreach project at your parish, through a service provided in your community, or in the way you attend to the children or sick or elderly in your care.
4. Look into the type of services that a local hospice provides to people who are dying and to their caregivers. Consider how you can volunteer to support their work or how you might promote their services within your parish or community.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Jesus, your words have power both to frighten and to delight us.
Help us be attentive, to hear what you are teaching us about death and about life.
Open our eyes to the challenges you put before us.
Show us how to receive the “little ones.”
Give us generous spirits and compassionate hearts.
We ask all of this in your holy name. Amen