

Closing Prayer

O God,
protector of the poor and defender of the just,
in your kingdom the last become first,
the gentle are strong,
and the lowly exalted.

Give us wisdom from above,
that we may find in your servant Jesus
the pattern of true discipleship
and the grace to persevere in following him,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B. ICEL. 1997²

Proper 20

(Sunday between 18 and 24 September inclusive)

Ordinary Time, week 25

Principal Service readings

Wisdom of Solomon 1.16 – 2.1,12-22

or Jeremiah 11.18-20

Psalm 54

James 3.13 – 4.3,7-8a

Mark 9.30-37

The false argument about life that the godless make

The scheming of the unrighteous is revealed to Jeremiah

Appeal to God, the just judge

Real wisdom and its opposite

Second prophecy of the Passion ; question of who is greatest

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Second prophecy of the Passion

After leaving the mountain ³⁰Jesus and his disciples went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; ³¹for 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.’ ³²But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

Who is the greatest?

³³Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the way?’ ³⁴But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.’ ³⁶Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name

² *Opening Prayers : Scripture-related Collects for years A, B and C from The Sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. 1997.*

welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’

Mark 9.30-37 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

Jesus begins the journey that will take him to Jerusalem; the journey probably took six months, as he visited various towns and returned to Galilee first.

Jesus wanted his journey to be kept secret (v.30). Did he wish to escape arrest at this time, or give himself more opportunity to teach the disciples?

In v.31 Mark gives us the second of three predictions he has inserted in his gospel like markers on the way to the Cross (8.31; 9.31; 10.32-24). Why is this message repeated?

The disciples didn’t understand what Jesus was saying, and didn’t want to ask (v.32). Why didn’t they understand? (a) they didn’t comprehend the authority that Jesus had; (b) they didn’t think that Jesus had to suffer; (c) they were too intent on quarrelling over who was the greatest.

The disciples were ashamed of their discussion over which one of them was the most important (v.34). Perhaps they had been prompted to discuss this by thinking about the incident recorded at the beginning of the chapter, and wondering why only three of them had been called by Jesus to go up the mountain with him and witness his transfiguration (9.2-8).

Jesus told the disciples that it is the ‘servant of all’ who is really the greatest (v.35), contrary to common understanding. The Greek word used here for ‘servant’ is *diakonos* (deacon), which some versions translate as ‘minister’. These terms are still used in the church.

Jesus used a living parable to illustrate his meaning as he welcomed a small child. What can we learn from this example?

Quotations

1

Oppression involves a failure of the imagination: the failure to imagine the full humanity of other human beings.

Margaret Atwood b.1939

2

You can’t expect a person to see eye to eye with you when you’re looking down on him.

anonymous

3

When people begin to ignore human dignity, it will not be long before they begin to ignore human rights.

G. K. Chesterton 1874–1936

4

Make us masters of ourselves that we may be the servants of others.

Alexander Paterson 1884–1947

5

Do you wish to be great? Then begin by being. Do you desire to construct a vast and lofty fabric? Think first about the foundations of humility. The higher your structure is to be, the deeper must be its foundation.

St Augustine of Hippo 354–430

6

If I am afraid of what I am for you, I am consoled by what you are for me. For you, I am a bishop; with you I am a Christian. The former title is that of the dignity I am invested with; the latter reminds me of the grace I received; the former is rife with dangers for me; the latter spells salvation and safety for me ... Seeing that I am entrusted with such important duties, help me with your prayers and your obedience; ask that I be affected less by the honour of giving you orders than by the happiness of serving you.

Sermon 340. St Augustine of Hippo 354–430

Related topics

For further study:

Stewardship; Ministry; Leadership; Death and Fear of Death; Christian Values

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