

Connecting with the Sunday Readings

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time Gospel Word
Mark 10:35-45

In Jesus' time, one's status was indicated by where one sat at the table. Jesus uses this arranging more than once to say that he and those who want to follow him should take the lower seats. In fact, his followers are to prefer the role of servant rather than seek to be the guest of honor. Today's Gospel reading creates an occasion for Jesus to once again reverse conventional thinking and ways of acting.

James and John decided to risk asking a question that showed what they were thinking. They were thinking ahead. They had not yet absorbed Jesus' message of discipleship. They want to be first. They want to be seen as important. They want to be seated next to Jesus when he comes back in glory. Jesus corrects them. And he uses the occasion to again reinforce that his way was not one of honor and prestige but one of service and yes, even suffering. The rest of the disciples hear about their friends' request and they become indignant, probably because each of them also wants that place, so Jesus makes it clear to all of them that greatness comes from being of service.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Living the Word

Seating arrangements are an important part of social engineering. When we host a party, after deciding the menu, we turn our attention to where our guests will sit, and who will be next to whom. Depending on who is there and where they sit, places can become important to people. For you it may not be a place at a dinner table. It may be where your office is located or how many windows it has, or how big your home is. It may be who you know or whom you want to be seen with. What kinds of clothes one wears, or where one shops can also become status symbols for adults and children.

The message of today's Gospel reading is not an easy one, especially because of the culture we live in. We live in a world that worships its heroes. We are highly competitive. We want to be number one as individuals and as groups. There are the "haves" and the "have-nots" and most of us want to be in the "haves" category. It's as if we are programmed to want more, to be in power, to be taken care of. We are told to be assertive, expressive, and grab for all that we can of life's bounty.

Perhaps one of the most seductive maxims of our time is, "You can have it all!" It directs us on a quest to grab all the gusto we can and not be satisfied until we do. Look at all those happy and beautiful people using or eating or drinking product "X." That's what I want! Today's Gospel reading implies the question: Do you want the popular brand? Is that the secret for achieving true happiness and self worth?

One-line Prayer

God of prosperity, give me a grateful
and generous heart.
Amen.