

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

Twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

The Gospel according to Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels. A major part of it is Mark's account of the passion and death of Jesus. This week's Gospel gives a hint of what is to come. Over the last few weeks we have been alerted to the wonderful words of Jesus and his acts of kindness and healing. There were no hard edges to what was there. Now the tone changes as Jesus teaches the disciples about the paradox of his suffering, death, and Resurrection. He informs them that the same paradox is the lot for those who accept the call to follow him. At this point, Jesus' followers had an idea of who he was and what was ahead for him, and them. In some ways, they were well off the mark.

We all live with expectations and assumptions about the way things ought to be. We live with hopes and dreams about our future. We want the best for ourselves and for everyone. But we also know that life can take turns that are totally unexpected and in conflict with our future desires, and can fall short of expectations. In fact, they can be the opposite of what we had hoped for. This is especially true when it comes to the bigger aspects of life like death, major illnesses, disabling accidents and other tragedies that come without warning.

A Gospel Word for the Home

Mark 8:27-35

Scripture scholars tell us the reading this Sunday is among the most important in the Gospel according to Mark. Jesus asks those closest to him about what others thought of him. It's almost as if he's taking an informal opinion poll. Eventually, he turns to Peter who without hesitation says that Jesus is the Messiah. End of story? Not yet.

The Jewish people had diverse opinions about the role of the Messiah. Some expected a powerful king to come and unite the nation of Israel. Some hoped for a powerful warrior who would drive the hated Romans from their lands and restore self-rule to the Jews. Some expected a cosmic leader from the sky who would decimate the enemies of Israel and turn them into ash. A few hoped for a holy prophet who would ignite greater interest in God. The one common theme was that everyone expected change.

In this Gospel passage, Jesus describes his role. And it wasn't what his closest friends thought that it would be. Jesus would be rejected by the religious leaders, would suffer and die, and would rise on the third day. All views of the Messiah and those who would follow him were cast in human terms of victory, and success had to be revised.

Thought for the Week

There is a hard edge to the Gospel. As we read through the Gospels, this hard edge is not in every passage, but it certainly is in this one. One of the greatest stumbling blocks to belief in a good God, or any God for that matter, is the occurrence of suffering and death. Why would God create a world with human suffering? Why would God allow suffering in good people? Why would God allow suffering of innocent children? These are very difficult questions and there is no simple answer to them even for those with deep religious faith. For the most part, they remain mysteries.

Jesus does not stand outside the experience of suffering, but freely enters into profound suffering himself, including death by crucifixion. Suffering is part of human life. So is the cross. Jesus invites us to follow him in the way he went. He wouldn't do so unless it was for our good and the good of our salvation.

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

Parent Survival

On some days being an involved parent can be very difficult. Some think the work of caring for children day after day is overwhelming. Sometimes children become ill and require round the clock attention. Sometimes children have mental or physical illnesses that are chronic. They always require special care. Add to these matters occasional conflict over family rules, table manners, and who is supposed to feed the dog. The list that challenges good parenting takes huge amounts of time and energy.

And while much of it can create moments of joy and satisfaction, there are also difficult times. Parents don't have to go looking for a cross to carry. They come ready-made, and taken up with love, they transform us.

Car or Meal Talk

Ask your children to name some of the difficulties in their lives. Might they be talking about their own crosses?

One-Line Prayer

Lamb of God, help us to carry the crosses of our lives. Amen.