

Connecting with the Sunday Readings

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time **Gospel Word**
Mark 9:30-37

Today's Gospel reading is actually the middle part of Jesus' teaching on discipleship which extends from Mark 8:22 through Mark 10:52. As Jesus journeys with his disciples from Galilee to Jerusalem, Mark frames the heart of his account of the Gospel around three predictions of Jesus' arrest: passion, death and Resurrection. After each prediction, Jesus' disciples either fail to comprehend or misunderstand completely what Jesus is saying. Each time Jesus clarifies once more what he means, so that there is no doubt concerning what he is about, or what is required of any of his followers.

Today we hear the second of Jesus' passion predictions, given in the context of "teaching his disciples." The disciples "did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him" (Mark 9:32). They go on to argue among themselves about who was the greatest of them. They have totally missed Jesus' point and are caught up in their own selfish agendas.

Jesus, the patient teacher, affirms that to be first, one must desire to be last and servant of all. By taking a child, who in those days would have been considered the least and most insignificant of persons, teaches us that attentiveness and service to the needs of the least is the measure of our greatness in the eyes of God.

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

Living the Word

If you are asking the question, "How can I be number one in God's eyes?" Today's Gospel reading has the answer. It is as totally counter-cultural to our world as it was to the disciples' world. Basically the answer is, if anyone wants to be first, then take last place. If you want to rule over others, be their servant. Bottom is top and last is first. Such social positioning diverges from how we measure being number one. People want the first place, which will be theirs once they climb the proverbial ladder of success. In a sense, Jesus is saying that ladder leads nowhere.

Human values and ways of measuring success do not always coincide with the values of the Gospel. What makes us successful in God's eyes is how we integrate the value of the dignity of human persons into our daily life and actions. How do I affirm the goodness and importance of the people with whom I share this life and planet: *the co-worker who drives me crazy; the rude grocery clerk; the people of a different race or gender, the friend who makes more or less money than I do?* People don't earn value by accomplishments, but simply because they are. No matter what his or her background or status, everyone is a beloved child of God. God's breath is in each of them. For that reason, everyone deserves our respect, our concern, and our affection. The cultural tendency to rate people and assign them a certain position is directly the opposite of what Jesus teaches us today.

One-line Prayer

Lord, help me to see, respect, and serve you in all people.
Amen.