



WHO IS THE GREATEST?

(MARK 9:30-37)

Christ and the disciples, façade of Monestir Monastery of Montserrat, Barcelona

After the experience of the transfiguration, Jesus and his companions continue their journey through Galilee.

Jesus' public ministry there is over: he will now instruct his disciples privately, beginning with his second teaching about his coming suffering and resurrection, and, as usual, they fail to understand the mystery of the cross as the unfolding of God's plan. They even seem to be moving into a state of wilful ignorance, being reluctant to ask questions.

The disciples' lack of understanding is heightened when we learn that they have been arguing among themselves about who is the most important. This provides the opening for Jesus' subversive teaching which we find throughout the Gospel versions about rank and status. Illustrating the lesson by introducing a child is not for sentimental effect: in the society of Jesus' time, a child did not represent innocence or the like, but rather someone who had no rights, no social standing, was totally dependent on others. There is nothing to be gained by being kind to someone who is, in effect, a "non-person". Jesus has called the Twelve apart from the wider group of disciples and directed this teaching at them in particular. Jesus puts his arms around the child, thus showing that this "non-person" deserves care and respect. Mark introduces the theme of treating Jesus well (or badly) in socially insignificant persons with the phrase "in my name", and welcoming Jesus means welcoming the one who sent him. ■

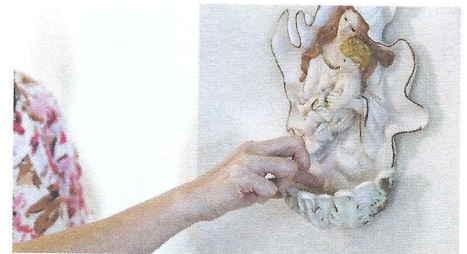
REFLECT

It is interesting that Jesus' teaching on humble and disinterested leadership is directed specifically at the Twelve, members of his inner circle. Given the social attitude to children of his day, his example of a child as being especially worthy of respect is nothing short of revolutionary. The Gospel presents us with values and principles which we are supposed to apply to our own times and circumstances. If a child represents a non-person in the society of Jesus' time, who fits that category in ours and what is our attitude towards such people? Who are our leaders most concerned about?

We might take comfort in Mark's description of the disciples and their difficulties in understanding Jesus and his message. In today's Gospel reading, their mistaken arguing about rank offers an opportunity for them to learn an important lesson from Jesus. The important thing about mistakes is that we should learn from them, not that we should not make them in the first place. The biblical picture of the people of Israel was that none of their repeated failures was the last word: God was always prepared to give them another chance. Even the disciples' ultimate abandoning of Jesus in Gethsemane was not to be the final scene in the story, as Mark's very writing of his Gospel shows. Our knowledge and understanding of Jesus is deepened by our questioning what we believe: the opposite of faith is less likely to be doubt than certainty, where there is no room for mystery. ■

DO

Make the Sign of the Cross and ask for the courage to keep asking questions about your faith.



LEARN

In the Synoptic tradition, Jesus makes three prophecies about his passion, death and resurrection.

The figure of Simon of Cyrene will illustrate Jesus' teaching on taking up the cross and following him.

A child, in the time of Jesus, was effectively a non-person, of no social standing.

SAY

**We adore you, O Christ,
and we praise you,
because by your holy
cross you have redeemed
the world.**

(from the Stations of the Cross)

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

I am the salvation of the people, says the Lord.
Should they cry to me in any distress,
I will hear them, and I will be their Lord for ever.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

O God, who founded all the commands of your sacred Law upon love of you and of our neighbour, grant that, by keeping your precepts, we may merit to attain eternal life. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

A reading from the book of Wisdom.
The godless say to themselves,
"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law and accuses us of playing false to our upbringing.
Let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have.
If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies.
Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of his and put his endurance to the proof.
Let us condemn him to a shameful death since he will be looked after – we have his word for it."
The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 53

Response:
The Lord upholds my life.

- O God, save me by your name; by your power, uphold my cause. O God, hear my prayer; listen to the words of my mouth. (R.)
- For proud men have risen against me, ruthless men seek my life. They have no regard for God. (R.)
- But I have God for my help. The Lord upholds my life. I will sacrifice to you with willing heart and praise your name for it is good. (R.)

SECOND READING James 3:16–4:3

A reading from the letter of St James.
Wherever you find jealousy and ambition, you find disharmony, and wicked things of every kind being done; whereas the wisdom that comes down from above is essentially something pure; it also makes for peace, and is kindly and considerate; it is full of compassion and shows itself by doing good; nor is there any trace of partiality or hypocrisy in it. Peacemakers, when they work for peace, sow the seeds which will bear fruit in holiness.
Where do these wars and battles between yourselves first start? Isn't it precisely in the desires fighting inside your own selves? You want something and you haven't got it; so you are prepared to kill. You have an ambition that you cannot satisfy; so you fight to get your way by force. Why you don't have what you want is because you don't pray for it; when you do pray and don't get it, it is because you have not prayed properly, you have prayed for something to indulge your own desires.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
I am the light of the world, says the Lord,
anyone who follows me
will have the light of life.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL Mark 9:30-37

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.
After leaving the mountain Jesus and his disciples made their way through Galilee; and he did not want anyone to know, because he was instructing his disciples; he was telling them, "The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men; they will put him to death; and three days after he has been put to death he will rise again." But they did not understand what he said and were afraid to ask him.
They came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" They said nothing because they had been arguing which of them was the greatest. So he sat down, called the Twelve to him and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all." He then took a little child, set him in front of them,

put his arms round him, and said to them, "Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
(all bow during the next three lines)
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Receive with favour, O Lord, we pray, the offerings of your people, that what they profess with devotion and faith may be theirs through these heavenly mysteries.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

You have laid down your precepts to be carefully kept;
may my ways be firm in keeping your statutes.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Graciously raise up, O Lord, those you renew with this Sacrament, that we may come to possess your redemption both in mystery and in the manner of our life.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.