

Twenty-Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time  
September 20, 2009

Readings:

Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

James 3:16-4:3

Mark 9:30-37

Have you ever had an experience where you were feeling so good about your self or something you had accomplished only to realize that you were not as great as you might have thought? Winston Churchill was once asked; "Doesn't it thrill you to know that every time you make a speech, the hall is packed to overflowing?" He responded "It is quite flattering, but whenever I feel that way. I always remember that instead of making a political speech if I was being hanged the crowd would be twice as big." As I reflected on today's readings two words came to mind humility and service. The Letter to James reminds us where great egos get us. "Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice.

Our first reading from the book of Wisdom could easily be considered a prophecy about Jesus. In fact it is a picture of how the life of a virtuous Jewish person is insulting to others. Never the less it certainly reminds us of the sacrifice that Jesus made. That sacrifice that we celebrate each time we gather at this table for Eucharist. Jesus' disciples had a hard time understanding that he must suffer and die. We too might have a hard time fully understanding what Jesus has done. God became human so that he could teach us to serve others. He suffered and died so that we might learn to do the same and that we might rise with him to new life. Our minds have trouble grasping this fully. If we really completely got it, truly understood it our life would be so very different.

In our Gospel from Luke Jesus for the second of three times predicts his death and resurrection. His disciples again do not understand and are afraid to question him. Perhaps they remember how Jesus reacted to Peter when Peter questioned Jesus. May be they did not want to appear ignorant by asking questions or perhaps they just didn't want to know for fear of the details. For whatever reason they chose instead to discuss who among them was the greatest. Jesus asks them what they were discussing but they were again silent. Jesus knew what they were discussing and he surely could have used that time to correct or scold them. But what did he do? He sat down. This was what Rabbis did when they taught, they sat down. This is Catechetical Sunday, the day we draw attention to those who teach us about our faith. We honor the religion teachers in our school, those who direct our programs, catechists, and parents who are the first and primary teachers of their children in the faith by word and example. It is also a reminder for each of us that we like Jesus' disciples for that is who we are, disciples of Jesus, are never finished learning about our faith. Last week we heard about the effort to have a library to remember Father Fisher but also to honor his memory by reading and learning more about our faith.

When Jesus sat down he said and did some remarkable things. He said, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and the servant of all." In the letter to James we hear about the wisdom of God. "The wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconsistency or insincerity." This wisdom is so different from the wisdom of the world where being first and winning seem to be everything. If you don't

win or come out on top you are a loser. There is a big difference between healthy ambition and selfish ambition.

I don't know how many of you follow professional tennis but the U.S. Open just ended where a young 20 year old won by defeating Roger Federer. Federer by many standards is one if not the best player to play the game of tennis. In his loss he said, "Maybe I look back and have some regrets but you know you can't have them all. I would like to congratulate Juan Martin on an unbelievable tournament. I had a great one myself but he was the best." I don't know if Roger Federer is a religious person but what I do know is that God ask us to serve others by putting them first.

Jesus also did something very unusual for his time. He took a child and placed his arms around him. Children in the time of Jesus were rarely if ever in the presence of adults, especially men. Jesus said, "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me." Jesus used a child because they were the most vulnerable but we know he was telling us that this applies to all who are weak and vulnerable, to strangers, to the ill and dying, to those imprisoned to those who suffer in any way.

Let me share with you this story about a person who visited a new parish. The person wrote the pastor of that parish. I will share with you some of what they had to say. "We arrived early just to make sure we were there in time. Upon sitting in the pew some people came in and sat down in front of me. My friend had not come in yet. One person began making comments about how I was sitting in other people's seat. When my friend arrived it was made very clear that we were not welcome in this seat. My friend and I moved to another seat. Thankfully those we moved near this time were welcoming of us. I know we are there for God and the wonderful sacrament of the Eucharist. However, it does make it rather hard to be focused when you feel you are not welcomed there. "

I tell you this story to remind us that we can sometimes get caught up in our own routines and surroundings in such unimportant things so that we forget about others. Jesus tells us we are to be welcoming and we are to serve others especially the vulnerable and those in need.

When we come to Mass we are to check our egos at the door. We bring our faults, sins, our hurts and worries and we place them on the altar with the gifts and just as bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ so to should be changed to be more like Christ. On this day when we honor those that teach us about our faith, about our God may we be open to learning how we can better be humble servants of God's people as Jesus taught us.