

**SPIRITUALITY**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

cf. 2 Thess 2:14

*R.* Alleluia, alleluia.

God has called us through the Gospel to possess the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*R.* Alleluia, alleluia.

**Gospel**

Mark 9:30-37; L134B

Jesus and his disciples left from there and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it.

He was teaching his disciples and telling them,

“The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise.”

But they did not understand the saying,

and they were afraid to question him.

They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house,

he began to ask them,

“What were you arguing about on the way?”

But they remained silent.

They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest.

Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them,

“If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.”

Taking a child, he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it, he said to them,

“Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me.”



**Reflecting on the Gospel**

The disciples are examples for us in so many ways, but today their example might not be what we expect. Here not only do they misunderstand Jesus (again) but they are afraid to ask him any questions. They are arguing amongst themselves. So Jesus turns the table and questions them. He wants them to tell him what they were arguing about. This almost sounds like a family squabble among the children where the parent has to step in and put a foot down. Per-

haps like petulant children called on the carpet, the disciples remain silent. They do not have an answer for Jesus.

Is this the way the disciples really acted? Are these the saints we revere? Are their actions worthy of emulation? The disciples serve as an example for us in that despite their misunderstanding, their arguments, even their petty jealousies about who would be the greatest, they continued to follow Jesus. Jesus does not expect perfection. The disciples clearly show that! Jesus accepts people for who they are and where they are. He asks that they follow him.

Jesus then teaches the Twelve about leadership and being counted as the first. The leader is to be the servant. This upends ancient ideas and certainly modern thinking about being “number one.” Power, riches, and authority, both in antiquity and now, are often used to amass more. But for the Christian it is to be different. For those who desire to be first, the greatest, the best, they are to be the last, the least, the servant of all.

Jesus places a child, one who has virtually no power or authority, in their midst. A child cannot return in like manner the kindness shown to it. The relationship with a child is one where we provide for and care for the child without expectation of return. What parent says to a child, “You’ll need to pay me back for everything I spent on you while you were growing up in our home”? We pour our hearts (and our wallets) out for our children. Christian discipleship is likened to that relationship. Rather than doing political favors for those who can (and do) repay in kind, we are invited to accept the child and all the self-giving on our part that entails. This, rather than clawing one’s way to the top, is the true marker of Christian love and service.

**Living the Paschal Mystery**

Discipleship turns our modern value system on its head. Yet we, like the disciples, have difficulty seeing that. We continue to debate popularity, count Twitter followers and Facebook friends, and admire those with power and authority. But in today’s gospel we are reminded to consider those who have little standing in the world.

The parent’s love for a child is a true reflection of Christian love and service. The parent does not count the cost of late nights, extra food on the table, additional expenses, or the anxiety that can naturally come with a child. Instead, motivated by love, the parent moves beyond oneself to care for another. We are called by Jesus to behave in like manner to others. We do not treat them as children, but we are to serve without counting the cost, to give without expecting anything in return.

Often both in antiquity and in the modern world relationships are governed by a mutual beneficence or, more crassly, favor trading. Laws have been estab-

lished to prevent the most egregious forms of this behavior, but it happens nonetheless at multiple levels. Though we are in the midst of the world, Christians are to have a different standard. Christians are to be of service. This kind of action may seem out of place. The maxim “Nice guys finish last” has more than a ring of truth to it. But Jesus reminds us today, “If anyone wishes to be first, / he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.” This message is difficult to hear and more difficult to follow. For most of us these are not the values we see lived every day. But by enacting them we bring about the kingdom of God on earth.

### **Focusing the Gospel**

*Mark 9:30-37*

Conflicting hopes and expectations of the long-awaited “age of the messiah” collide in today’s gospel.

A somber Jesus speaks cryptically of the death and resurrection awaiting him in Jerusalem, while those closest to him argue about their own greatness and status in the Messiah’s reign (that must have been quite a conversation among the disciples to elicit such a strong reaction from Jesus!). Many of the Jews of Jesus’ time dreamed of a messiah who would restore their nation’s political zenith as it was under David—but Jesus explains to them (yet again) that the Messiah’s reign will be a kingdom of spirit and conversion in which humble service, not wealth and influence, will be exalted. Jesus makes clear the great paradox of discipleship: Do you wish to be first? Then become last. Do you seek to attain greatness? Then become small. Do you want to be masters? Then become the servants of those you wish to rule.

To emphasize the point, Jesus picks up and places a little child in the midst of these would-be masters. A child has no influence in the affairs of society. Just the opposite is true: a child needs everything. To be “great” in the reign of God, Jesus says, one must receive the “child,” and become self-giving.

### **Focusing the First Reading**

*Wis 2:12, 17-20*

Those who stand up for what is right, who speak out against injustice, who advocate for the powerless face the ridicule, revilement, and torture of the powerful and greedy “wicked” who perceive such “just one[s]” as a threat. This was the fate of many of the prophets of the Old Testament—and of Jesus in the gospels. Today’s first reading from the book of Wisdom portrays the evil machinations that suppress and eliminate those who dare to speak God’s word of justice.

### **Focusing the Responsorial Psalm**

*Ps 54:3-4, 5, 6-8 (6b)*

Today’s responsorial psalm is the lament of someone who has endured great hardship at the hands of the wicked (as the “just one” faces in today’s first reading), but the psalmist refuses to despair and remains confident in the justice of God.

### **Focusing the Second Reading**

*Jas 3:16-4:3*

In today’s passage from the letter of James, the writer speaks to the theme of service by exhorting the Christian community to put one’s own individual “passions” last for the good of all. War and conflict are futile, James writes; God calls the church community to “cultivate peace.”

### **PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS**

Do you know of individuals whose humility have led them to accomplish great things for others?

What is the most important lesson you learned from a child? What have children taught you about the Gospel values of service, charity, compassion, and justice?

Have you ever acted against your own interests for the common good? Did you regret it? What positive outcomes resulted?