

**SPIRITUALITY**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Mark 10:45

*R.* Alleluia, alleluia.

The Son of Man came to serve  
and to give his life as a ransom for many.

*R.* Alleluia, alleluia.

**Gospel** Mark 10:35-45; L146B

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came  
to Jesus and said to him,

“Teacher, we want you to do for us  
whatever we ask of you.”

He replied, “What do you wish me to do  
for you?”

They answered him, “Grant that in your  
glory

we may sit one at your right and the  
other at your left.”

Jesus said to them, “You do not know  
what you are asking.

Can you drink the cup that I drink  
or be baptized with the baptism  
with which I am baptized?”

They said to him, “We can.”

Jesus said to them, “The cup that I  
drink, you will drink,  
and with the baptism with which I am  
baptized, you will be baptized;  
but to sit at my right or at my left is not  
mine to give  
but is for those for whom it has been  
prepared.”

When the ten heard this, they became  
indignant at James and John.

Jesus summoned them and said to them,  
“You know that those who are recognized  
as rulers over the Gentiles  
lord it over them,  
and their great ones make their authority  
over them felt.

But it shall not be so among you.

Rather, whoever wishes to be great among  
you will be your servant;  
whoever wishes to be first among you will  
be the slave of all.

For the Son of Man did not come to be  
served

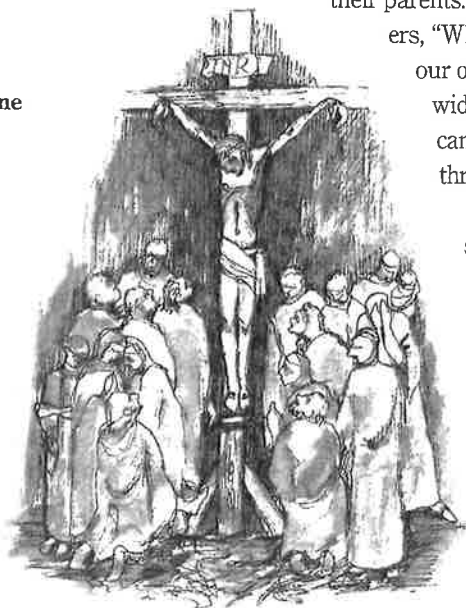
but to serve and to give his life as a  
ransom for many.”

or Mark 10:42-45 in *Appendix A*, p. 303.

**Reflecting on the Gospel**

Two men in cahoots together, scheming to get special treatment. This kind of setup is familiar in movies, the news, politics, and even (unfortunately) in daily life. And today we hear about it in the gospel. Human nature being what it is, two men, brothers in this case, are angling to get a better deal. They speak with Jesus on their own, in private. Their rather bold statement, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you” is met with open receptivity on Jesus’ part. The

way this story begins is reminiscent of children asking something of their parents. As a patient, listening parent, Jesus asks the brothers, “What do you wish me to do for you?” What would be our own reply to Jesus at that moment? His question is wide open. What do we want from Jesus? This question can be the source of fruitful meditation and prayer throughout the week.



For the brothers, they want glory, to sit at Jesus’ side in his kingdom. They still imagine that Jesus will be a powerful earthly King, ruling over an independent and free Jewish people. But as Jesus did with Peter after Peter proclaimed him the Messiah, Jesus corrects James and John’s misconception. Jesus told Peter that the Son of Man would suffer and ultimately die. He will invite the sons of Zebedee to do the same by asking if they can drink the cup that he drinks. This is a cup of suffering, an image reminiscent of the one spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah and in the Psalms. Before glory there must be suffering and even death. When the brothers seek glory, and a seat at either side of Jesus, they do not realize that they are thereby accepting suffering.

James and John’s desire for glory provides Jesus the chance to expound once again on Christian discipleship, which is not the way of the world. For the disciples, greatness comes in service. The servant is the master. Jesus, the true Master and teacher, did not come to be served, but to serve. Even today, the gospel message of service flies in the face of cultural mores. How many powerful people with authority have underlings to do their bidding? In the power structures we find at work, in family, and in the marketplace, those at the top set the agenda and have their wishes carried out. Those who surround the powerful carry out the wishes and commands of the top. With Jesus, this structure is inverted. The greatest is truly the one who serves. The mark of greatness is humility.

**Living the Paschal Mystery**

Gospel values should cause us to rethink how we are living our lives. We are never “there,” having arrived at Christian perfection, with nothing more to do. Instead, the message of Jesus consistently calls us to go deeper, question more, and change our behavior to more closely match the Master. For what purpose do we do what we do? Are we seeking the golden ring? The life of retirement and leisure? Do we want to be the most important or admired person in the room? Is personal glory the goal? Rather, the Christian life is about self-emptying service. The Christian life does not put the self in the center, but puts the other, with his or her needs, in the center. Today we might ask ourselves, whose needs will I put before my own?

**Focusing the Gospel**

*Mark 10:35-45 (shorter form: Mark 10:42-45)*

In the gospel reading a few weeks ago (but just a chapter ago in Mark’s gospel), Jesus admonished his disciples for their pointless argument among themselves as to who was the most important. James and John apparently did not get the message. In today’s gospel account, the two sons of Zebedee—who, with Peter, make up Jesus’ inner circle—ask for places of honor and influence when Jesus begins his reign. James and John proclaim their willingness to “drink the cup” of suffering and share in the “bath” or “baptism” of suffering Jesus will experience (the Greek word used here is *baptizein*, meaning “to immerse” oneself in an event or situation).

Most readers share the other disciples’ indignation at the incredible nerve of James and John to make such a request. (Matthew, in his gospel, casts the two brothers in a better light by having their mother make the request [Matt 20:20].) Jesus calls the disciples together to try again to make them understand that he calls them to greatness through service. Jesus’ admonition to them is almost a pleading: *If you really understand me and what I am about, if you really want to be my disciple, if you really seek to be worthy of my name, then you must see the world differently and respond to its challenges with a very different set of values. The world may try to justify vengeance rather than forgiveness, to glorify self-preservation over selflessness, to insist on preserving the system and convention for the sake of compassion and justice—but it cannot be that way with you.*

**Focusing the First Reading**

*Isa 53:10-11*

In his fourth and last song of the “servant,” the prophet Isaiah exalts the one whose suffering will reconcile the people with God. This text especially resonated with the first generation of Christians after the resurrection who struggled to make sense of the suffering and death of Jesus. For Isaiah, the suffering of the “servant” is the means to God’s re-creation of humanity: from the dark injustice of his death, the light of God’s justice dawns; from the apparent hopelessness of his destruction, a life centered in God is made possible for humankind. (These two verses from Isaiah 53 are the conclusion to the first reading on Good Friday.)

**Focusing the Responsorial Psalm**

*Ps 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22 (22)*

The psalmist invites the just to join in this song of praise to the God of mercy. The images of these latter verses of Psalm 33 exalt the virtues of humility, perseverance, and gratitude.

**Focusing the Second Reading**

*Heb 4:14-16*

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews praises Jesus as the “great high priest” who, in his death and resurrection, reveals a God of great mercy and compassion. (These verses are also read as part of the second reading on Good Friday.)

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

Who is or was the most “humble” person you have known—and what did his or her humility teach you?

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Have you ever worked or served with someone who led by the “power” of service and the example of commitment?

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When have you found it most difficult to heed the words of Jesus, “it shall not be so among you”?

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Have you ever had to confront another’s ambition or arrogance, similar to the attitude of James and John in today’s gospel?

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