

Our Gospel today opens with Jesus telling the disciples that he would be “handed over to men” who would kill him but that he would then rise on the third day. The disciples don’t understand and since they won’t question him about this, we must turn to the first reading which gives some explanation as to why this will happen. Jesus is the just and righteous one whose very goodness confronts the sinfulness and exposes the shame of those who are supposed to be religious leaders and examples, and they hate him for this.

We can sit here on a Saturday/Sunday in September and shaking our heads and thinking how horrible it was that those terrible men did such a thing to Jesus, however, many of us react in the same way the scribe and Pharisees did to Jesus. Do you take a certain pleasure when someone famous or influential is brought down or shamed in some way especially if that person doesn’t agree with your point of view? Do you get really irritated, even hostile when someone catches you in some misdeed even if it’s very small? Most of us like to be seen as good and moral people, but few of us take it well when our weaknesses or failures are pointed out and corrected by others. A related point and perhaps a subject for a homily all by itself, whenever we give into any of the temptations mentioned in today’s readings or fail to do the good things they mention, we kill or drive out the Just and Righteous One who seeks to dwell in our own hearts. We make our heart of hearts the friend of the wicked and the hater of goodness. Not a pleasant reality, but something we should seriously consider.

The Gospel moves on to the disciples arguing among themselves about their status in the group. The opening sentence from today’s passage from the Letter of St. James seems to directly comment on their squabbling as he writes, “where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, **there** is disorder and every foul practice.” St. James goes on to explain where wisdom, which is from God, is found and why our asking doesn’t meet with a favorable response, as he puts it, because we ask wrongly. **“Well then, how are we supposed to ask?!”** If that’s your attitude, it’s almost like having a ship that has a gash in the hull, a busted rudder and an engine that works only 20% of the time, and thinking that fixing a burned out running light is going to solve the problem. There’s much more going on than the identified problem. Patch the hull. Fix the rudder. Repair the engine. That is, stop and really listen to what Jesus teaches us and take it to heart. That’s what Jesus is doing with the disciples when he puts the child in front of the disciples. He’s not preaching a pro-life sermon. The child in Jesus’ time

had no social status. Infant mortality was very high and children often died of disease or injury. They loved their children, certainly, but they gave them full rights and made them legal heirs to the inheritance only when they were likely to survive long enough to produce offspring themselves. Jesus commanding the disciple to receive a child in his name wasn't telling them just to be nice to a kid. To **receive** someone was to welcome them as a highly honored guest, like you would the mayor or the governor, or in our day a sports star. Jesus uses the child to tell the disciple to receive the nobody like a real somebody. The lesson for the disciples of Jesus is two-fold. First, forget your selfish and personal ambitions. As St. James says in them lays disorder and every foul practice. Second, everybody is a real somebody, and should be welcomed as if we were welcoming Jesus himself. Set aside the little kid place before the disciples; that was just an example. Who is the person or group of people you least want to welcome? It's time to work and pray about getting over why you don't want to welcome that person or group. Again, this isn't a pleasant reality, but these ones are also your brothers and sisters in Christ.