

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 23, 2018 B

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask Him to help us to hear the Word He wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Loving God, in today's Word you teach us that an important part of true discipleship involves humble trust in you and a willingness to serve others. As we reflect on your Word together, deepen our love for you and each other. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week. Did the Word impact your thinking and/or behavior? Did change occur and how was it?*

Facilitator: In today's second reading, James tells us that "evil cravings unchecked lead us into immoral behavior." We see clear examples of this in the first reading and the Gospel. In the first reading, the wicked plot the downfall of an innocent man. In the Gospel, sinful inner cravings of the Apostles have them jockeying for the first place in Jesus' kingdom. In this **third lesson** on discipleship, Jesus calls his disciples to a leadership style that finds its fullest expression in humble service.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is He wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a Word, you may want to write it down to remember.

Read the assigned Scripture readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider reading the commentary after each reading if you have not done so prior to your meeting.

FIRST READING: Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks about his upcoming passion and death. This reading is chosen because it speaks of the rejection and mistreatment of God's servant. It also fits in well with the second reading which speaks of "inner cravings"—like jealousy and envy.

The people have an intense dislike for the Just One. His way of life is a condemnation of their own. His virtue shows their lack of virtue. Like the enemies of Jesus, they plan and plot to silence and actually kill the virtuous one. Their minds and hearts are so distorted and twisted that they see nothing wrong in their behavior. Unfortunately, this reading stops short of proclaiming God's vindication of his servant (verse 22).

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 54

This Psalm is a lament by a just person whose life is in danger. It harmonizes well with the first and third readings about a just man's life in danger.

SECOND READING: James 3:16-4:3

James is addressing disharmony within the Christian community. The causes listed are internal. When our

sinful inner cravings go unchecked, they can wreck the life of the community. Or we can say that the author contrasts heavenly and earthly wisdom. Wisdom from above is peaceable, docile and rich in compassion. It produces a rich harvest of right relationships with others. In contrast, earthly wisdom is self-centered, e.g., when one doesn't get his/her way, he/she can become disruptive and divisive.

GOSPEL PROCLAMATION: Mark 9: 30-37

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

A participant reads the Gospel then all pause to reflect...

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to write down the Word you hear.

A participant reads the Gospel again then all pause to reflect...

GOSPEL COMMENTARY: Mark 9: 30-37

Let us now read the Gospel commentary privately.

This is Mark's *third lesson* on discipleship. *The true disciple is one who seeks to serve rather than be served.* The Gospel opens with Jesus' second prediction about his suffering and death. The disciples have no idea what Jesus is talking about. Their lack of understanding shows when they get into a discussion as to who among them will be the most important in the new Kingdom Jesus is about to establish. When Jesus arrives, they fall silent because they are embarrassed to tell him what they have been arguing about.

Jesus teaches another *lesson on the nature of discipleship.* He illustrates his lesson by standing a child in their midst. (In Aramaic, the same word is used for a child and servant.) Jesus then tells his ambitious disciples: "*If you want to be truly great, you must learn to be humble and unimportant like this little child.*" The best and purest kind of service is that rendered to the most insignificant members of society, symbolized here by a child. Jesus is also saying that false ambition is the desire to rule over others—which is very damaging to the unity of a community. True ambition, on the other hand, is the desire to serve others—which helps build a strong community. Here, Jesus does not condemn ambition but rather redefines it.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse in the Gospel caught your attention. Why?

Share the next questions in small groups of 2 or 3 or with the whole group.

2. "If we were truly in touch with our giftedness and blessings, we would never suffer from feelings of jealousy." Agree or disagree? Why? In your opinion, what causes us to be jealous of others? What will help us to be freed of this vice?

3. St. James speaks about the *disordered* inner inclinations that can get us into trouble. Can you name one disordered inner inclination, past or present, that you struggle with? What helps you to cope with it so that it does not become a destructive force in your life?

4. How would you distinguish false ambition from true ambition? How does one seek to get ahead in the work situation without succumbing to false ambition?

5. What will help us to grow in humble service particularly when we are in a leadership position?

6. What is one thing Jesus is saying to us in this Sunday's Gospel about how a disciple should speak or act? And what do you need to do or change to be a better disciple?

JOURNALING: *Having listened to the Word of God, let us now take some quiet moments to write down what is coming to us. What are you hearing God say to you? Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as He asks of you. Go wherever the Spirit leads you.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Consider sharing with one other person how you can act on or respond to the message of this Sunday's Gospel. Suggestions: This week, be attentive to any dis-ordered inclinations that surface in your thinking and behavior. Look for how you can transform them into service.

SHARE PRAYER RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD:

Share a prayer, however brief on the Gospel you have just heard, discussed and journaled about. For example: *Lord, help me to keep my eyes fixed on you since you have the words of everlasting life.* Or: *Lord, when I want to grumble help me to remember all the blessings in my life.* In other words, the prayer at this time should flow from the readings. (Consider standing in a circle and hold hands.)

CONCLUDE WITH A PRAYER OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION:

Let us now share personal prayers of petition (prayers for self) and intercession (prayers for others).

Pray for government and Church leaders and also parents, that they all strive to follow the leadership style of Jesus. Pray especially for people carrying the cross of persecution because of their belief in Jesus.

CONCLUDE WITH A SONG ©