

Homily on Mark 10:35-45

October 21, 2018

Intro: In interpreting a passage in the bible, look at the passage immediately before it. In this case, Jesus has for the third time predicted his suffering and death in Jerusalem, and once again his disciples do not understand what this means for their lives.

Mark: James and John thereupon ask Jesus to sit on the positions of power in his coming glory. There is not going to be any glory; Jesus is going to be put to death. He asks them if they can drink the cup of his suffering in their own lives. They respond confidently, "We can!" But when the time of his suffering begins, they cut and run, to save their own skins. They can't drink the cup, although eventually James will.

Now the other ten apostles hear that James and John have stolen a march on them; they are mad at them. They wanted to be in the positions of power in Jesus' Kingdom. They have not understood Jesus either. And so Jesus gathers the whole bunch for his re-teaching them about the meaning of human life.

The Gentiles find the meaning of life in power, authority: "...rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt." But that is not what it means for Jesus and his disciples: "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." This is a great contradiction for the world; it turns our world upside down: the least will be the first, and the slave will be the great one.

What is the proof of this paradox? "The [divine] Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." God Himself has come to earth to show us the true way to life and true happiness. The glory that the disciples seek will come only after their own period of suffering and serving of others, just as Jesus' glory comes in his resurrection. But the glory and happiness is not just in a heavenly future. Jesus was joyous and happy while he was serving others, and he expects us to find happiness and joy in his paradoxical way of life while we are on earth.

The Meaning for us:

We live in a world of self-seeking and self-indulgence---all kinds of people seeking power or abusing authority for their own satisfaction and glory. This atmosphere infects us all.

In our country:

People seeking the presidency although they have no experience or skills necessary for the job.
Elected officials whose main concern is not serving their constituents but getting re-elected.

In our Church:

Priests who think priesthood entitles them to the first slice from wedding cakes.
Priests unwilling to enact reforms in their parish which will impede their road to be bishops, and bishops maneuvering to be archbishops or seeking to be cardinals.

In our schools: teachers whose job security is more important than their students' growth.

In our families:

Parents who seek to maintain their authority rather than their children's growth in responsibility;
Even older brothers or sisters who maintain their position over their younger siblings.

All of us are self-seeking when we self-identify as a winner, or when we are determined to have others notice

how special we are, or when we threaten anyone who criticizes us. Even when we self-identify as a victim, when we wallow in self-pity when we are hurt, when we retreat into painful memories and turn inward, away from others.

In all of these we are narcissistic, or egoistic, where EGO means Edging God Out, or Edging Others Out. We are serving ourselves, not serving others. We are not only contributing to the abusiveness of our world, but we are unhappy.

We need divine guidance to deliver us from our culture of self-seeking. And so the Son of God came to teach us the way and to vindicate the proof of his teaching by dying for his truth. And God vindicated Jesus' truth by raising him from the dead, to the glory that comes from self-giving in love.

Jesus is right---our glory and joy even here on earth is to live as he did, in the service of others. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, welcoming the homeless, opening our doors to refugees makes us truly happy. Rejoicing in their joy increases our joy, because filling others' needs is filling our own need when we identify them as part of our Body, the Body of Christ. Living in others expands our life and brings fulfillment.

That is what we have come to reinforce in ourselves at this Eucharist. We hear from the ambo Jesus' teaching of the true way. At the Eucharistic prayer when Jesus says "Do this in memory of me, he means not only celebrating the Eucharist, but living it, handing over our bodies and blood to others as he did for us. Do this and you will live; it is the good news.