

Homily of Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B 2021

Wisdom 2:12, 17-20; Psalm 54:3-4, 5, 6-8; James 3:16-4:3; Mark 9:30-37

The first reading, from the Book of Wisdom, was a prophecy of what would happen to Jesus in the hands of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Scribes and the Chief Priests. Jesus challenged and reproached them for transgressions and violations of God's Commandments. For this reason, with revilement and torture they put Jesus to tests and trials, and condemned him to a shameful death. But God took care of Jesus and raised him from death. In the gospel of today, Jesus says of himself, "The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death he will rise" (Mark 9:31).

As the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Chief Priests took offense at Jesus, sometimes, we take offense at those who challenge us, and those who correct our ignorance and wrong-doing. As Jesus was crucified; in the same way, many people have lost their life because they challenged injustice in the system and in society. Many people have lost their jobs, positions, and relationships because they took the path of truth and justice.

Jesus' story did not end with his death; it continued with his resurrection. This means that a messenger of truth and justice can be rejected, silenced, suppressed, punished, expelled, eliminated, or killed; but no matter how long it takes, truth and justice do resurrect; and many times come back to haunt the aggressors. Jesus encourages us, "Therefore do not be afraid of them. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna" (Matthew 10:26-28).

In the second reading, St. James names the reasons for the disorders, conflicts, killings, and wars in our world: "Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice... Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members? You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war" (James 4:1-2). Wherever there are in justice, envy, jealousy, and selfish ambition, the evil consequences are disorders, foul practices, conflicts, killings, and wars.

Envy, jealousy, and selfish ambition block the mind to truth, as it did with the apostles. They were so engrossed in their bickering on who was the greatest among them that they were not touched when Jesus spoke to them about his passion and death. In the same way, envy, jealousy and selfish ambition block the ears and hearts, and blind the eyes of many civil and religious leaders that they do not see the sufferings of the poor, or hear their cry.

In the gospel, Jesus took a child, "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'" (Mark 9:36-37). A child needs help, protection, support and cannot be left by him/herself or to fend for him/herself. A child is defenselessly vulnerable. Therefore, the child Jesus speaks of are the sick, the weak, the hungry, the elderly, the frail, the lonely, the refugee, the prisoner, the homeless, and the needy. The greatest people are those who serve and provide for people such as these. Jesus challenged his disciples and challenges us, "if anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35).

The danger with envy, jealousy, and selfish ambition is not only their evil consequences on the society, the vices are, also, destructive to those whom they possess and who possess them. It is, therefore, a helpful spiritual exercise to constantly examine the true motivations of our decisions and actions. Let us pray to have the courage not to proceed with our decisions and actions if we are motivated either by envy, or jealousy, or selfish ambition.

Let us, also, pray that we follow the paths of justice and selflessness, being considerate of one another, lifting up and building up one another. By so doing, being great and feeling great are not limited to a few privileged people, but to many people who are lifted up and many people who are built up.

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