

## Homily of Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, 2024

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 about what would happen to Jesus in the hands of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, and the chief priests. Jesus reproached and challenged them for their 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 today's gospel, 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, the scribes, and the chief priests took offense at Jesus and crucified him, sometimes, we take offense at those who challenge us and those who correct our ignorance and wrong-doing. The same way, many people are persecuted or lose their life because they challenged injustice in the system and in the society. Many people lose jobs, positions, and relationships because they take the path of truth and justice.

Jesus' story did not end with his crucifixion and death. His story continued with his resurrection. This means that a messenger of truth and justice can be rejected, silenced, suppressed, punished, expelled, eliminated, or killed. However, 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, violence, conflicts, killings, and wars within and around us, in our society, and in our world: "Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul [evil] practice..." (James 3:16). "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 is injustice, or envy, or jealousy, or selfish ambition, then, the consequences such as disorders, or foul (evil) practices, or violence, or conflicts, or killings, or war are inevitable.

Envy, or jealousy, or selfish ambition block the mind from perceiving reality. That was the case with the apostles. They were so engrossed in their bickering on who was the greatest among them that they were not concerned 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 leaders and rulers that they do not see the sufferings of the poor nor hear their cry.

The danger with envy, or jealousy, or selfish ambition is not only the evil consequences on the society, they are also destructive to those whom they possess or who possess them. That is why Jesus advises, "Put away your sword ... "Those who use the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

In the gospel, the apostles were arguing among themselves, who was the greatest! It became a teaching moment for Jesus. He took a child and placed it in their midst and spoke to them. The child represents vulnerability, helplessness, and dependency. The child Jesus speaks of in this context are the sick, the weak, the hungry, the elderly, the frail, the lonely, the stranger, the prisoner, the homeless, the broken hearted, and those who have other needs. The greatest people are those who serve and provide for the needy. Jesus says in today's gospel, "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). Also, he says, "I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

Let us pray for the grace to leave behind us envy, jealousy, and selfish ambition; but follow the paths of justice and selflessness, become considerate of one another, lift up and build up one another. True greatness is not in material possession but in good character and in service. Jesus says, "The greatest among you must be a servant" (Matthew 23:11). By good character and service, God makes us great, makes our family great, makes our church great, makes our community great, and makes our society and our world great. "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you" (James 4:10). While goodwill exalts, ill will destroys (Proverbs 14:34).

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