

October 17, 2021
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 10:35-45

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." He replied, "What do you wish me to do for you?" They answered him, "Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" They said to him, "We can." Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared."



When the ten heard this, they became indignant at James and John. Jesus summoned them and said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. 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. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

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Background

Last week's gospel ends with Jesus reassuring Peter and the disciples that "there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come" (Mark 10:30). Mark then describes Jesus addressing the disciples for a third time about the events that await him in Jerusalem. "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles who will mock him, spit upon him, scourge him, and put him to death, but after three days he will rise" (Mark 10:33-34). This is Jesus' clearest statement yet of his impending passion, death and resurrection. The contrast between what Jesus foresees as his immediate future and what James and John seem to anticipate draws more attention to Jesus' prediction.

One of the things Mark is doing, by placing the request of James and John immediately after Jesus' most explicit prediction of his rejection, cross, and resurrection, is to demonstrate to Mark's community the true nature of discipleship. Mark often portrays the disciples as facing the same issues that his community is dealing with.

In the text, James and John ask Jesus for positions that would signify authority within the realm of power and glory. The other disciples seem to be upset with what James and John have done. But this is not because they have totally misunderstood what Jesus has been trying to teach them, or because they are embarrassed for them. James and John have requested what the others, themselves included, were hoping Jesus might bestow on them. Jesus' question to them, about

whether or not they were ready to accept both the baptism and the cup that he will drink, draws on a familiar custom of their culture. When the family gathered for its meal, the patriarch of the family poured each person's cup. Those attending the meal were expected to accept without question whatever was given to them. Here Mark is reminding his community that they, too, have been baptized into the life of Christ, and they are receiving from the cup at their weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. They, like the disciples in the gospel, are Jesus' disciples, and as Jesus accepts the cup that has been poured out for him by his Father, they too must accept in faith what God prepared for each of them.

Mark's gospel focuses on Jesus, who faithfully accepts his role from his Father, even when it is not understood by his closest disciples. By Jesus' word and example in today's gospel, he is reminding his disciples that greatness in the kingdom is found in humble service.

Reflection Questions

1. When have you felt pleased or grateful for the person that you are?
2. When have you also felt discouraged by the person that you are?
3. Read the two verses preceding today's gospel, imagining the look on Jesus' face as he tells his closet followers: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles who will mock him, spit upon him, scourge him, and put him to death, but after three days he will rise" (Mark 10:33-34). What are some of the feelings arise within you?
4. Read today's gospel with Jesus still sitting among those same disciples and as James and John approach him. Can you imagine Jesus' face as this gospel unfolds?
5. If you were there, maybe, Jesus' mother, what would you have said to James and John?
6. What does the way Jesus responds to James and John say to you about who Jesus is?
7. Jesus asks James and John if they can drink the cup that he will drink. If Jesus asked that same question of you, what would you respond?
8. Can you talk to God about your own hopes for your life, what you think God might desire for you, or some other awareness that arose within you from this gospel.

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM.
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