

***FIRST IMPRESSIONS*** 25<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY (B)

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

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

**PRENOTE:**

We have posted on our webpage Sr. Brenda Walsh, OP's reflections on Pope Benedict's recent encyclical, "Caritas in Veritate" ("Charity in Truth"). Go to: <http://www.PreacherExchange.com> and click on "Justice Preaching."

Mark doesn't give the disciples much of a break does he? Today's gospel is a good example. Jesus has just taught them about his up-coming suffering, death and resurrection. Mark tells us the disciples didn't understand what Jesus was saying to them. They seem to want to change the subject – as we most likely would do.

After their arrival in Capernaum. Jesus asks what they were "arguing about on the way." They are reduced to silence. Their crassness and ambition are exposed as they admit to arguing about who was the greatest. The disciples may not have understood what Jesus meant about his rejection, suffering and death. But instead of discussing what that and his "rising from the dead" might mean, or what they would do if Jesus were treated as he predicted – they talk about their future prospects. Could they have been that insensitive about what he had just taught them? They were on the road following him and he was going to suffering and death. What did they think was going to happen to them, his followers? Surely not glory and seats of power!

Mark doesn't smooth out the rough edges of the disciples. He just presents them as they were – people of their time. They, with their co-religionists, were hoping for the arrival of the Messiah to overthrow their enemies and lead Israel to greatness. Last week we heard Peter proclaim Jesus as the Christ (8:27–35). The disciples following Jesus to Jerusalem believed they were walking side by side with the Messiah. They were right; but they were wrong about the kind of Messiah Jesus was. They saw glory up ahead of them and they were arguing about the place settings for their thrones. They needed to be taught that the power Jesus will inaugurate as Messiah will take the shape of service. God's love for us will be shown in power – but a power redefined as service to the least.

I wonder if the leaders of the early church, for whom Mark wrote, were already

claiming rank and privilege? He may have written his gospel to remind them what Jesus taught about their responsibility: they were to be “the least of all and the servant of all.” That’s a sobering reminder, not only to the church’s hierarchy. It also addresses other people in charge: diocesan officials, heads of liturgy committees, parish councils, financial administrators, teachers, etc. Power easily goes to our heads. We need regular reminders that we are servants, whether we wear pectoral crosses, clerical collars, business suits, have ecclesial titles on our doors or stand in front of a class of unformed minds.

When you come right down to it, we may seem to have power – but we really aren’t in control, no matter what our rank or privileged position. It doesn’t take long for us to realize that our best-made plans don’t always work out. The power to plan and design our futures is very tenuous indeed. The disciples seeking position of authority and recognition will soon be frustrated in those plans. Jesus is instructing them that they need to shift their attention elsewhere, to an investment in the future that will not fail them. They need to follow their master, and do as he did, use any authority they might receive in service to others.

Who is the “greatest?” If the disciples are to gain lasting dignity they must be willing to be a servant “to all.” And more. The disciples must receive the child in Jesus’ name. Children in Jesus’ time had no rank, no rights and no privileges. They were property of their fathers and so were exceedingly vulnerable. The disciple is to be just like that, Jesus says, “welcome the child” into their lives – accept being vulnerable and therefore dependent on God.

Still more – instead of seeking out and serving the high placed and important in society and church, the disciple is to seek out the company of the poor and no-accounts of the world, the insignificant – the “children.” What we know from other teachings of Jesus is that in “the least” we will discover Christ himself. As we celebrate the “true presence” of Jesus in today’s Eucharist, we might consider where in the world we also discover his true presence. We could begin looking in the direction he points today – to the least. “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.”

The gospel can be so contradictory; so opposite to our ideals and values; so impractical. For example, many airlines allow a person to go online 24 hours before the scheduled departure of a flight to choose seats. So, when I have a flight

reservation that's what I do. As soon as the 24-hour limit comes I quickly go to the airline's webpage and choose the best seats I can. "First come, first served." It's an axiom our world lives by. Heaven help the person who jumps ahead of others on a supermarket line, at a buffet, or a movie line. "First come, first served!" we will shout.

But in God's kingdom, Jesus tells us to make a deliberate choice to serve others and renounce any thoughts of being first on line. This doesn't make sense if we merely rely on our own logic. It's that contrary gospel! Jesus isn't inviting us into a logic classroom; but into a school for discipleship. He urges us to believe and accept the mystery of God's reign, manifested in all its fullness in Christ. After all, in Jesus that's exactly what God did – become the servant, willing to leave behind all divine splendor and take up the limitations of our human condition, all the way to death on the cross.

James gives us a vivid description of our human condition and our evil tendencies in our second reading. Considering his description of our human state, it's no wonder we have such a difficult time with Jesus' teaching about accepting the child into our lives. But there is no teaching without the grace to accept the teaching – as impossible as the instruction may seem.

Sometimes even a brief phrase in the Scriptures will give hope and suggest the presence of God's grace. Today the phrase that speaks to me appears in the opening verse, "Jesus and his disciples left from there and **began a journey ....**"

If we feel stuck in a place, attitude or spiritual disposition, we are reminded that, with Jesus, we can leave that place of "stuckness." And go where? We can go in the direction of becoming fuller, more complete disciples. This is the phrase that speaks to me today, Jesus and his disciples – "began a journey." We're not there yet, not the perfect disciples who have left everything and followed Jesus; not the docile and self-sacrificing ones who have left behind prestige and seek to serve the least.

Rather than being disheartened at our incompleteness, we can take heart. We may not be "there" yet, but we are in the process of becoming the disciples Jesus has called us to be. We have begun our journey, and we are not struggling to get there on our own because, as Mark reminds us, we have Jesus with us as we travel – on "the journey." This Eucharist today is another moment on our journey towards

discipleship. Here we hear a grace-filled word and receive a meal that helps us take the next steps towards being the disciples Jesus has in mind, those who, “shall be the least of all and the servant of all.”

### **FAITH BOOK**

*Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. “Faith Book” is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.*

#### **From today’s Gospel reading:**

Taking a child, he placed it in their midst,  
and putting his arm around it, he said to them,  
“Whoever receives one child such as this in my name,  
receives me.”

#### **Reflection:**

As we celebrate the “true presence” of Jesus in today’s Eucharist, we might consider where in the world we also discover his true presence. We could begin looking in the direction he points today, to the least. “Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me.”

#### **So, we ask ourselves:**

- Can I “receive” and accept the child within myself – the vulnerable and scared little one whom God has already accepted?
- What can I do or say to protect the children in my community or world?

### **JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD**

**The Wisdom from above is ...peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits...”(James 3:16)**

*“Charity is at the heart of the church's social doctrine ... It is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones).” ( Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, 2009)*

A national initiative called **Project Homeless Connect** has been established in over 150 cities across the country. Services for the homeless are difficult to access and often are spread out geographically. Project Homeless Connect brings multiple service providers together in one place on one day to provide easy access to resources. **Raleigh’s 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Project Homeless Connect will take place on Thursday, October 8<sup>th</sup> in Moore Square in downtown Raleigh.**

#### **Did you know?**

“The N.C. Interagency Council for Coordinating Homeless Programs (ICCHP)

sponsors an annual point in time survey each January. The survey was conducted in more than 55 counties. It provides an unduplicated count of people who were homeless in our state on one given night.

**The 2008 survey found:**

- 12,371 people identified as homeless, including
- 3,643 people in families, 2,216 of whom were children.
- 1,054 identified themselves as veterans of military service.
- 1,961 identified themselves as having a serious mental illness.
- 4,206 identified themselves as having a substance use disorder.
- 1,108 identified themselves as being a victim of domestic violence.
- 6.5 percent of people identified themselves as having been released from the criminal justice system.
- 6 percent of people identified themselves as having been released from a mental health hospital or drug treatment program.

**What you can do:**

· **Project Homeless Connect needs volunteers for this one-day event.**  
**There will be a one-hour training session for all volunteers. Please visit the website: [www.raleighhomelessconnect.org](http://www.raleighhomelessconnect.org) to volunteer or to find out more information.**

· You can also call Sacred Heart Parishioner, Sally Bruns at 834-0666 x 233 to volunteer. Sally is the volunteer coordinator for this event. She will be glad to hear from you.

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

**POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES**

*Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates' names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.*

Please write to:

- Ted Prevatte            #0330166    (On death row since 2/22/99)
  - Raymond Thibodeaux   #0515143    (3/2/99)
  - Lyle May                #0580028    (3/18/99)
- Central Prison    1300 Western Blvd.    Raleigh, N.C.    27606

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

Jude Siciliano, OP

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