

Homily for
September 23, 2018
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Our readings this morning present to us a conflict. *Wisdom*: Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us, he sets himself against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law and charges us with violation of our training. *James*: *Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice*. *Mark's Gospel*: They had been discussing amongst themselves on the way who was the greatest. Passion for power, authority, possessions, prestige seems to drive the world. In fact, the wisdom of the world is ruled by worldly passions, seven deadly sins: Lust, greed, pride, envy, anger, gluttony and sloth.

There are so many problems that arise from jealousy and selfish ambition. At work, people place a few negative thoughts into the ear of a boss in order to hamper a fellow employee's promotion and open up a position for themselves as climbing the corporate ladder takes precedence over honesty and integrity. In schools, particularly High Schools, young people routinely bully the weak or destroy the reputation of others so they can gain popularity, exert pressure or simply look better before their peers: "Well, she might seem to be all that holy, but let me

tell you what she is really like.” or “He might appear to be this great moral guy, but this is what he’s done.” And the hurt begins. Another person’s or your own reputation, self-respect and privacy are violated. And Good people suffer. Jealousy, hunger for power, prestige, retaliation and self-gratification are evident in the workplace, schools, homes and even the Church.

But God provides an alternative to worldly wisdom. James: *But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity.* Mark’s *gospel*: If anyone wishes to be first he shall be the last of all and servant of all. Wisdom: For if the just one be the son of God, God will defend him and deliver him from the hands of his foes. Passion for true justice, equality, compassion and love are what drive heaven. The Wisdom of God is ruled by heavenly passions, seven cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, courage, faith, hope, and charity.

Why then is it so difficult for us to choose between the world’s wisdom and God’s wisdom? My granddaughter has cerebral palsy. She melts into my arms when I pick her up and has know idea how wonderfully loved she makes me feel in just allowing me to hold her. She has no ambition, no power or prestige and yet lacks for nothing. Her five siblings compete to see who gets to hold her next, never once do you

hear a complaint. How appropriate that her name is Sophia the Greek word for wisdom. She teaches us the importance of feeling love.

Caring for her reminds me sometimes of a commercial perhaps some of you have seen or remember for the special Olympics. There are seven handicapped participants on the starting line. The gun sounds, the race begins. They all start out moving as fast as they can, depending on their handicaps. About a third of the way into the race one of them falls to the ground. Almost as one, the other participants stop. Two of them turn around run back to the boy, pick him up and shoulder him, one under each shoulder. They get him to his feet and all seven begin to go to the finish line, each waiting for the other until they all arm in arm cross the finish line together. There is a great silence in the crowd. They had never seen a race like this. This would be a race to end all races. In appreciation of what happened, a great cheer went up, a great feeling of "Yes, this is the proper way to run the race." This story would be a story that Jesus, if he had heard it, would have told to his disciples.

In the Gospel Jesus uses a helpless child to reach the minds of his disciples to reach our minds to overcome our handicap our blindness to the obvious. We're not in a race for prizes in life. We are not here to be in competition with each other, although we all enjoy a game of football now and then. We are in life not for achieving, although achievement is a very important thing, not for becoming wealthy, not for becoming

nobles, not for becoming stand-outs, wearing designer clothes of the well-to-do and being considered a rung above everybody else, living lives of the rich and famous. It's not that success is even bad. It's that we place the value of success or anything else above the value of love, above the value of a person, any person. Without the Wisdom of God to temper it, to infuse it with virtue the Wisdom of the world is handicapped.

We are here, as Jesus says, to serve, to become slaves, for one another, to love one another, to put our God given talents at the service of others. The handicapped children had it right. They make the decision to serve each other. They recognize their own need in the need of another and respond with love and care for each other. They understand that it doesn't matter if you are handicapped, when you have the support and love and caring of others to lift you up. We are here to become conscious of the needs of the people around us and see how well we might serve them. For in serving, Jesus says, we enter in to the heart of God.

At each moment of our existence the crossroad of life is laid out before us: Lust, greed, pride, envy, anger, gluttony and sloth or prudence, justice, temperance, courage, faith, hope, and charity. We cannot avoid the choice between right and wrong, good and evil. Our

direction seems obvious, and yet we hesitate. Perhaps now is the moment to ask ourselves: Why? Why do I hesitate?