

Homily. 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year.B. 18/19 September 2021.

Three times, once each in chapters 8, 9 and 10 of St. Mark's gospel, Jesus tries to teach and help His disciples to understand that He is destined to be rejected, suffer grievously, die and then rise again. Last weekend we heard the first of these so called 'passion predictions' and this weekend we've just listened to the second.

On each of these occasions St. Mark tells us that the disciples didn't understand what Jesus was saying, what He meant and what this would mean for them. Since the words Jesus spoke were clear enough it would be easy to dismiss this as the disciples just being a bit dense. To do so however would be to underestimate the difficulties that the disciples were labouring under. Moreover, putting the disciples misunderstanding down to their slow wittedness is to think that we'd have done better, which would only display the arrogance and ignorance alive in us.

The disciples, living 2000 years ago, had a long religious and cultural expectation that the Messiah would be victorious over the enemies of the God's people, ruling in great glory forever. They'd been taught to expect this reign in temporal and political terms, not in terms of the Spirit and Gods greater plan for the whole of creation. Nor did the disciples have the benefit of the hindsight that you and I possess, seeing things as we do through the lens of the resurrection, for this was something that hadn't happened. As it is for us today, the future could only be pictured in terms of their present knowledge, cultural formation and life experience.

Jesus talk of His rejection by the leaders and people, His suffering, death and resurrection was all gobbledygook, a talk of things that simply didn't

fit into any scheme they had about the promised Messiah, any vision they had for the Christ for God. Jesus may as well have spoken to them in another language, and in a way He was doing exactly that, speaking the language of God's way to people who couldn't even conceive of God ever letting such things happen, let alone using them for good to save not just the Jewish people but the world. No wonder Mark says they were too afraid to ask Jesus what he meant, for not only was He forecasting a horrible outcome, He sounded a bit mad and they feared for His sanity.

Seeing their fear and incomprehension Jesus tried another method. He went back to brass tacks, asking them what they'd been arguing about on the road. This embarrassed them into silence for their dispute had to do with which of them was the greatest. This was only of concern if they thought, which they did, that the victory of Jesus would bring them some personal glory and power over others. Enter now the little child, with Jesus making His points about being last, least and servant of all, the very spirit and meaning that His rejection, suffering, death and resurrection would turn out to be and to mean for Him, for them and for all disciples everywhere and of all times.

Now comes our question; Have we let Jesus teaching and example strike home with us any better than those disciples managed two millennia ago? It's easy for us to say yes with the light and insight of the resurrection shining behind us, but in truth I do wonder if we really have?

What Jesus message means for us is walking every day in the way and in the footsteps of the Lord. It means dying to our own dreams and desires so as to live in the Spirit the dream and plan of God for us, relying on God much as a little child totally relies upon and trusts its parents. With this in

mind, maybe we'll be slower to judge those first disciples as being thick when we stop to think about the things that so occupy our time and energy when we're busy arguing together on the road that is our lives.