

The Journey Away from Self

Daily Gospel / Liturgical Cycle A

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Mark 9:30-37

Jesus and his disciples left from there and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it. He was teaching his disciples and telling them, "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." But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him. They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, he began to ask them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they remained silent. They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest. Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all." Taking a child, he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it he said to them, "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."

Introductory Prayer: Lord Jesus, I believe in you, present and interested in my life. I believe you await my prayer to guide my heart, my visits to the Eucharist to strengthen my will, and my challenges to help my surrender. I trust you will give your life to me in exchange for my self-denial. I love you and want to love you more by embracing and living out your will. Mother Mary, teach me to say with you, "Let it be done unto me."

Petition: "Speak Lord, your servant is listening"

1. Apostolic Training: This was one journey Jesus chose to do in secret. Why? Because he wanted to dedicate all his attention and efforts to teaching his apostles the deepest and most important secret of his life: He must die! All that they had lived so far was thus incomplete, merely a preparation for the final act of his mission: the consummation of his love, his total immolation on the cross. Would they understand the need for the seed to die before rising to new life? How hard it would be for them to listen! He was their Lord, the powerful, Messianic king coming to free them and establish his kingdom of truth and love. They still imagined scenarios of new victories, cures, defeat of demons, the silencing of their opposition.... How far their dreams were from Jesus' message! We too have our own desires and needs. Can we detach ourselves from these dreams long enough to understand in prayer his will and his plan of salvation for us?

2. Slow Learners: Not only did they "not understand the saying," but "they were afraid to question him." In other words, they did not want to know. How often our communication problem is not something intellectual, but rather something of the will! Our desire is more to "get our way," "make our point" or "affirm ourselves." Learning Christ's way requires that we in some way unlearn our own ways. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). This explains why no one can be neutral before Christ; he challenges us to change our life. Jesus occasioned the fierce opposition of those who would ultimately put him to death. How open am I to his challenges? Do I listen in prayer in order to respond with a docile but firm "Amen"?

3. The Hardest Lesson: Like little boys caught in the act, the apostles don't dare admit that they have been arguing about who among them is greatest. Not only do they fail "to listen" to Jesus; to the contrary, they are busy asserting their will. What would it take to teach them this most difficult but vital truth? So Jesus, with a father's love, holds a child before them and begins the lesson anew. This small child is the greatest! To be last, to serve, to give your life makes you great, since this is how God comes to us. Only the sight of Jesus crucified would burn this lesson more deeply on their hearts. Am I learning this lesson of sacrificial love to become the greatest I can become?

Conversation with Christ: Dear Lord, open my heart to listen to your will for me. Free me from my own self-love, ideas and dreams. Teach me to die to myself as I enter into prayer and as I enter into work. Help me to work, pray and live so that you and your love can rise up in my life in place of the poverty of my own qualities and efforts.

Resolution: I will listen well before trying to offer my own thoughts or desires in prayer and in interacting with family and others, so better to hear the Lord.