

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Oct 20, 2024: (Mark 10:32-45)

Jesus teaches the recipe for Self-Exaltation

"We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise." (Mark 10: 33/34)

The Purpose of Mark's gospel:

Jesus informs his disciples three times about his suffering, death, and resurrection, and all three times, guess what Mark places in the next paragraph?

- (1) The first time Jesus brought it up (in chapter 8), one of them (Peter) rebuked Jesus.
- (2) He brings it up again in chapter 9 and they argue about who is greatest.
- (3) In chapter 10, this serves as the background to our Sunday gospel, Jesus brings up the topic for the third time. How will they respond there? "... the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise." ***Then James and John came to Christ asking for special positions in the kingdom of heaven. "Teacher,"*** ... Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." (Mark 10:33-37)

In the gospel of Mark, agreed to be the earliest Gospel, Jesus predicts his death three times, recorded in Mark 8: 31-33, Mark 9: 30-32, and Mark 10: 32-34. This is significant. In the Bible, repetition of a phrase or concept three times often signifies emphasis, completeness, and certainty. This triadic repetition carries symbolic significance, highlighting the message's importance and certainty.

But they did not understand what he meant

The more clearly Jesus says it, the more confused his disciples get. Everything else Jesus said they could see just fine, but they went blind and deaf whenever Jesus talked about suffering. Why is this so?

Willfully Blind

They did not understand his meaning and were afraid to ask him about it. This was a willing blindness. If they wanted to understand, all they would have had to do was ask him for clarification, but they did not. Up to this moment, the difference between the crowds and the disciples was whenever Jesus said something hard, the crowds went away confused, but the disciples asked Jesus what it meant—but not on this topic because they were afraid of the answer.

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Mark's style of writing:

Sometimes, when confronted with suffering, our ears clog up, and we get hard of hearing. Perhaps we don't want to hear about suffering. This might be a human tendency. That may be because no one wants to suffer, but there's a deeper reason, and Mark shows us why. He is not going to tell us because Mark writes with a paintbrush instead of a pen - he likes to show more than tell. In the arrangement of the material, Mark, in his gospel, points to some selective blindness and deafness in the disciples. What is it?

Self-Exaltation

The first time Peter exalted himself above Jesus and rebuked him. The second time, they all try to exalt themselves above one another, arguing about who is greatest. And the third time the sons of thunder are jockeying for the top two spots in the kingdom. Self-exaltation, self-exaltation, and self-exaltation.

Problem with Self-Exaltation: Self-exaltation naturally follows self-deception. It creates an illusion that we are something "great" and leads us to depend on ourselves rather than God.

Signs of Self-Exaltation: Give priority to performance – more concerned with your performance than the impact your action made in people's lives. Bittered when people don't recognize your importance or worth or mention your efforts. Always want people to know your achievements, the sacrifices you make, or how committed you are to a place/church. Using the power of exaggeration to make it more presentable and always comparing with a heart of competition. Last Sunday, we saw Jesus teach them the proper response to his instruction about suffering: Jesus says, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. (Mark 8: 34-35).

Christ died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So, you can see how if one's life is oriented toward self-exaltation, he/she will go deaf and blind every time Jesus tries to teach him/her something that implies self-denial because self-denial and self-exaltation are like oil and water. Whenever God calls us to do something that hinders our quest for earthly greatness - humbling yourself, forgiving someone who hurt you, going to a person to reconcile a broken relationship, giving up comfort or money or security to do something that has no guarantees - anything that's going to put us in a position of lowliness, we naturally get really confused. When seeking human greatness, suffering and humiliation are eliminated as possibilities.

"For even 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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Followers of Jesus Christ are required to sacrifice, serve, and ultimately submit to God. This is their way of life.

Hebrew 4: 16: “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”. Christ is our king, our leader, our friend and our counselor. Let us approach Him with full confidence when we pray.

First reading (Isaiah 53:10-11)

“Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.”

The Big Question: Is there anything the Lord wants to teach me right now that he can’t teach me because of some attitude in my heart that’s blocking it? Ask God to search your heart and reveal any attitude causing deafness whenever God wants to teach me specific lessons.

Thank you, and may God bless you and guide you. Amen.

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