

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME  
Year B: Wis 2:12, 17-20; Ps 54; Jas 3:16-4:3; Mk 9:30-37  
September 19, 2021  
Fr. David Pignato

When we hear in the Gospel that the Apostles argued about which one of them was the greatest, right after Jesus announced to them that He would suffer and die, it's almost unbelievable to us, isn't it? It seems so juvenile and immature, so insensitive and even crass, that they were arguing about who among them was the greatest, even while they were in the presence of Christ, the Holy One, and even though He had just predicted His Passion and death. But such is the reality of our fallen human nature, which the Gospels report and record so honestly and accurately. This should not discourage us or depress us, because the Sacred Scriptures are given to us to help us address the reality of our human nature and sanctify our lives.

In the second reading today, St. James reminds us that all the external conflicts we witness in our own lives and in the world come ultimately from our passions within. Where unruly and unholy passions exist within, such as jealousy and selfish ambition, disorder and foul practice result for all the world to see. All external conflicts, both major and minor, begin in the human heart, where passions can be uncontrolled and untamed.

The first reading today, from the Book of Wisdom, warns us of even more serious depths to which the human heart can sink, if we don't control our passions. Those who don't take care to foster virtue in their souls can sink even to the level of resenting the righteous: *"The wicked say: 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 violations of our training. Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him. For if the just one be the son of God, God will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes. With revilement and torture let us put the just one to the test that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience. Let us condemn him to a shameful death; for according to his own words, God will take care of him."*

These haunting words describe so well what Our Lord Jesus Christ was up against when He suffered to redeem us. Those who opposed Him knew He was innocent, and yet they still opposed Him, and they even resented His righteousness. It's one thing for a person to be jealous or selfish and ambitious. It's quite another thing, and even worse, to resent the righteous. What can begin as simple jealousy

or ambition, if not checked and corrected, can escalate into something far worse – to bitterness, resentment, scorn and even hatred of what is good in others. As the Prophet Jeremiah said, “*More tortuous than anything is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it?*” (Jer 17:9).

There’s a saying that holds true for both the psychological life and the spiritual life: what’s happening on the outside indicates what’s happening on the inside, and once the inside is healed, the outside can be healed, as well. Both behavioral experts and spiritual directors know that the interior life determines the exterior life. As St. James says, “*Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members?*” (Jas 4:1).

Sacred Scripture is often like a mirror that invites us, challenges us and even forces us to reflect on our souls and acknowledge our faults and imperfections, such as any unruly passions that may be causing conflict in our lives and in our relationships. Some people don’t like to be reminded of this, perhaps because it touches a nerve and challenges them to consider and focus on an aspect of their life that they prefer to keep off the radar of their thoughts. Some people prefer only to be affirmed and not to be challenged. But the Word of God is given to us both to console us and to challenge us. “[*T*]he word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart” (Heb 4:12). And the Word of God is given to us to help us sanctify our lives, including the interior life of the soul, which determines the exterior life of our actions and our words.

Our Lord Jesus, of course, desires that our lives be peaceful and free of conflict. But He reminds us that the peace we desire in our lives must begin with order and discipline and virtue in our souls. He came, not to discourage us by reminding us of the defects of our fallen nature, but to provide a remedy for it and to help us rise above it, with the help of His grace that flows through the sacraments. And so, the goal of our spiritual lives should be to grow in the virtues of temperance and humility and purity and charity, so that we can bring order to our passions within, and let that order and peace in our souls overflow into our families, our homes and our world. Whatever peace we hope to find in our lives and in our world must always begin with the sanctity that Christ wants to give us within ourselves.