

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

(Wisdom 2:12, 17-20; James 3:16-4:3; Mark 9:30-37)

Excerpts from Pope Francis - 20 September 2015

Excerpts from Pope Benedict XVI - 24 September 2006

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Brothers and sisters, the Book of Wisdom speaks of the persecution of the righteous, those whose “mere presence” annoys the ungodly, or godless. Today, we would say the unbelievers, or the atheists. The godless are described as those who oppress the poor, who have no compassion for the widow and show no respect to the elderly. The godless claim to believe that “power is the norm of justice”. They dominate the weak, use their power to impose a way of thinking, an ideology, a prevailing mindset.

They use violence or repression to subject those who simply by their honest, straightforward, hardworking everyday life show that a different kind of world, a different kind of society, is possible. The ungodly are not content with doing anything they like, giving into their every urge; they do not want others, by doing good, to show them for who they are. In the ungodly, evil is always trying to destroy good.

This Book of Wisdom was written around 50 years before Christ. We can easily find in history, nations who killed thousands of people. Let us ask the Lord to give us the gift of discernment to detect in time any recurrence of that malicious attitude, any hint of it that can taint the heart of generations.

Jesus in the Gospel tells us of a temptation of which we have to be very careful: the desire for primacy and domination over others, which can dwell in every human heart. How often has it happened that one nation or group considers itself superior, with greater acquired rights, with more privileges needing to be preserved or gained. What is the antidote that Jesus proposes when this impulse appears in our heart or in the mentality of any society or country? To be the last of all and the servant of all; to go to the place where no one else wants to go.

In the words of Pope Francis, if we could allow the Gospel of Jesus Christ to reach the depths of our lives, then the “globalization of solidarity” would be a reality. “In our world, especially in some countries, different forms of war and conflict are re-emerging, yet we Christians remain steadfast in our intention to respect others, to heal wounds, to build bridges, to strengthen relationships and to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2)” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 67).

In this way, we can keep far from our lives and our cultures the possibility of destroying one another, of marginalizing, of continuing to discard whatever we find troublesome or uncomfortable. Jesus puts a little child in our midst, so that all of us can feel challenged to respond. Will we respond? Did the disciples respond? It seems it took them a while to hear and response.

We hear for the second time Jesus proclaiming his passion, death and Resurrection to the disciples (cf. *Mk* 9: 30-31). The Evangelist Mark highlights the strong contrast between his mindset and that of the Twelve Apostles, who not only do not understand the Teacher's words and clearly reject the idea that he is doomed to encounter death. Jesus patiently explains his logic to them, the logic of love that makes itself service to the point of the gift of self: "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all".

This is the logic of Christianity, which responds to the truth about human beings created in the image of God, but at the same time contrasts with human selfishness, a consequence of original sin. Every human person is attracted by love - which ultimately is God himself - but often errs in the concrete ways of loving. Consequently, an originally positive tendency but one polluted by sin can give rise to evil intentions and actions.

In today's Liturgy, this is also recalled in the Letter of Saint James. His words call to mind the witness of so many Christians who humbly and silently spend their lives serving others for the sake of the Lord Jesus, behaving in practice as servants of love, and therefore, being peacemakers. There is no doubt that following Christ is difficult, but, as he says, only those who lose their life for his sake and the Gospel's will save it, giving full meaning to their existence.

There is no other way of being his disciples, there is no other way of witnessing to his love and striving for Gospel perfection.

May the blessed Virgin Mary, help us in opening our hearts ever wider to the love of God, a mystery of joy and holiness.