

Sept. 19, 2021

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wis 2:12, 17-20

Jas 3:16—4:3

Mk 9:30-37

GROW: I have a competitive nature. As an older runner, I strive to place high in my age group (maybe even pick off runners older than I one at a time as we near the finish of a race – of course, I can neither confirm nor deny that). Oh, to be first! There is nothing inherently wrong with healthy competition. However, constantly striving to be the “best” or the “first” in other areas of life – career, parenting, even holiness – can quickly lead to frustration and burnout. As the disciples jostled for “first place,” Jesus gently but directly corrected them: “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.” Like the Apostles, we tend to focus on our achievements as a measure of our worth, forgetting why we are here: to serve others. We can ask Jesus to help us gain the “wisdom from above” and the characteristics so beautifully described by Saint James: pure, peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits.

GO: Reading today’s Gospel from Mark, I am struck by the image of Jesus embracing a child: “Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me.” Most of us picture our own children, grandchildren, godchildren, nieces, or nephews. Of course we would embrace them! However, Scripture scholars point out that for Jesus, the child symbolized the *anawim*, a Hebrew word for the poor, the lowly, the vulnerable, the oppressed. Picture, then, not just children but those we might be less eager to immediately embrace, not just children: ragged men on the corner, immigrants at the border, the neighbor’s son with schizophrenia, prisoners or ex-convicts. Jesus challenges us not to avert our eyes but to “embrace” them – whether that means offering a cup of coffee, becoming a pen pal, stopping to chat, or finding another way to accompany them. Scholars tell us that the *anawim* share a total dependence upon God, something we all have in common regardless of our life’s circumstances.

ACTIONS: Seek “wisdom from above” at the beginning of each day. In the evening, reflect on the ways God has held you in his loving embrace through the kindness of others, moments in nature, simple pleasures. Say thank you.