

On the Way to Jerusalem 2 – Some thoughts and Studies for Lent 2021
The Disciples James and John seek preferment! Mark chapter 10, verses 35 – 45

The Context:- Mark 10, verses 32 – 34; The comment in Luke's Gospel, chapter 9, verse 51 is appropriate here - *"when the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."* The very fact that Jesus was walking ahead of his disciples sets the scene. On this occasion he did not walk with them but led the way. He knew where he was going and why! This was at least the third time that he had told them the awful truth of what lay ahead. (See also Mark 8, verse 31 and Mark 9, verses 31 – 32). His disciples were astonished at his attitude and the throng which followed him would be afraid of a confrontation with the authorities. That the disciples were concerned about this is seen in John chapter 11, verses 7 – 8.

The Encounter:- Mark 10, verses 35 – 40; It must have been the promise of the resurrection at the end of verse 34 that inspired James and John to approach Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel it is their mother that takes the initiative! (Matthew 20, verse 20) She is another one coming to Jesus and kneeling to make a request (see last week's reading: Mark 10, verse 17). Whoever takes the initiative, the conversation which follows is between Jesus, and James and John the disciples. It seems that there was still an expectation on the part of (at least some of) the disciples that the Jesus as the Messiah would come into his earthly kingdom when they arrived in Jerusalem. James and John, who already held a privileged position in the group (see for example Mark 5, verse 37 and Mark 9, verse 2), asked for places of pre-eminence – to sit on the right hand and left hand of the king!

In verses 38 – 40, the personal remarks of the Lord to James and John show that the honours they ask for are not to be handed out as favours to friends – no "Honours List" for favourites in the Kingdom of God! The disciples of Christ must be prepared to follow him in his trials, sufferings and death if they are to have entry into the Kingdom of Heaven, see Matthew 10, verses 38 - 39. In Gethsemane Jesus spoke of his death as a "cup" (Mark 14, verse 36) and his "baptism" as a figure for suffering and death (Luke 12, verse 50).

The Teaching:- Mark 10, verses 41 – 45; This sorry spectacle of selfish ambition became an occasion for the Lord to re-emphasize the nature of true greatness. The disciples had already been discussing among themselves who was greatest (see Mark 9, verse 34). Leadership in the Body of Christ, the Church, is not to follow the pattern laid down by the "Gentiles" - the worldly rulers! Jesus himself was the supreme example of one who manifested true greatness. Jesus was God's Messiah with the title "Son of Man" - Mark 2, verse 10; Daniel 7, verse 13 – 14 and Revelation 1, verse 13. He could have asserted his right to be ministered to by men. Instead he came *"... to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."* The word used here for "ransom" was in common usage in everyday Greek at the time of Jesus. It referred to the price paid to free a slave. This was the price demanded by a holy God in order that justice may be satisfied in the forgiveness of sins. As a result of this payment the believer is freed from sin and Satan.

As Christ's disciples we need to "read, mark learn and inwardly digest" Philippians 2, verses 5 – 11!

"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."