

Mark 9: 30-37

30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know it; ³¹for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.'³² But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

33 Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the way?' ³⁴But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. ³⁵He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.'³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'

Commentary: Once again, Jesus is teaching his disciples the messianic secret: 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.' But the disciples on their part continue to be impotent in their understanding and their boldness to ask him.

Their failure to understand is also linked to their failure to accept the way of the messiah, which is that of humble service, not the greatness of prestige, power, wealth, success and security. A child represents vulnerability and need. A child can give you nothing of power, wealth, security, worldly success or prestige. A child cannot protect you from betrayal, rejection or death. But a child can teach you the beauty and fullness of loving and being loved in and through one's heart. A child can teach you sincerity and authenticity with no place for façade or doing things just to please others or get ahead.

This time of Covid-19 is a time of greater urgency and need for all of us in some way. It is that much more urgent to be more real in what matters and who matters and how real and authentic we are in our relationships. It is that much more urgent that we regroup and re-think what our life purpose is and how we will serve rather than gain for ourselves. It is that much more urgent that we find ways to reach out beyond our confinement rather than remain stuck and isolated in our minds and hearts even as we suffer physical isolation.

Jesus is challenging his followers to trust a journey where following him in a way of service will also involve the vulnerability of letting go and giving up much that has mattered in our world and its values, in order to take up new commitments and develop new capacities to love as our world truly needs to be loved. To love truly outwards is also the path to finding true love for oneself. We must 'deny ourselves and take up our cross' as Jesus says, in order to find a true life worth living.

Prayer: Giving up, letting go and creating inner space is a constant need for us, O God. Contaminants, germs and viruses that are toxic keep seeping into our souls. Find us and

fill us up again and again, with your cleansing, healing, renewing love so that we find our way as your followers with new courage, new joy and new peace... Amen.