

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES
TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – YEAR B

Second Reading James 3:16–4:3

We have been reading the Epistle of James for the past four weeks – and James is a writer who addresses his audience in clear and forthright language. The implied question throughout is: *‘How can I live a good life?’*



In this, James is very much influenced by Wisdom literature; in particular the Book of Proverbs.

Greek culture considered Wisdom as the most desired virtue. It is attractive. It comes *‘from above’* – that is to say, it is not a human achievement but comes from God. Wisdom and Godliness are loosely connected: *‘For the Lord himself is the giver of wisdom’* (Proverbs 2: 6). James does not actually say what heavenly Wisdom is like, but he describes its results. In many ways these are similar to the fruits of the

Spirit listed by St Paul in his Letter to the Galatians: *‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control’* (Galatians 5: 22).

Reading James’s lines on peacemakers, we can’t but be reminded of the seventh of the eight Beatitudes in St Matthew’s Gospel: *‘Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God’* (Matthew 5: 9).

James writes against a background of strife in the communities around him, and the *‘wars and battles’* he mentions are to be taken as a general tendency, rather than as precise events.

Having looked at the general cause of the conflict, he then gives specific examples of why it occurs: *‘It is because you do not pray’* for what you want. His advice echoes that of the Gospel writers: e.g. Mark 6: 33; Matthew 7: 7–11; John 14: 13–14.

Gospel Mark 9: 30–37

St Mark’s account of the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem (8: 27 – 10: 52) is at the heart of his Gospel. Today’s reading focuses on Jesus teaching his disciples away from the crowds.

‘The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men; they will put him to death ...’

Jesus has now left the North, where he was safe, and is making his way to Jerusalem, where he knows that he will be betrayed. He avoids the crowds so as to continue instructing and preparing his disciples for forthcoming events.

‘What were you arguing about on the road?’

When Jesus asked this question of his disciples they were silent with shame. They had still not understood the real meaning of what Jesus had been telling them. They were still thinking of his kingdom in earthly terms and the status they could gain from being part of it.

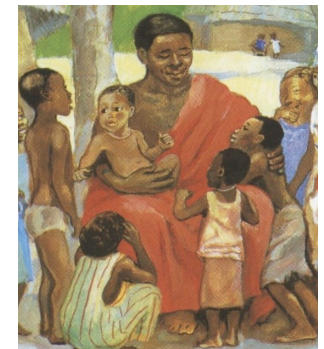
So he sat down, called the Twelve to him ...

When a Rabbi was officially teaching and making a pronouncement, he sat down. Jesus took this position to teach his disciples what it meant to be great in his Kingdom. But their ambition for status must be channelled into service: *‘If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all, servant of all’*.

He then took a little child, set him in front of them ...

In the society of that time, there was no middle class: people were either very rich or poor. People judged you by the status of the company you kept.

To illustrate his teaching further, Jesus embraces a little child, an example of one of the most helpless creatures in society. Children had the same status as slaves. (People often had many children since the infant mortality rate was very high (50% under the age of 16).) Christians must show hospitality to people with the same status as children in society: the outcast, the sinner, the sick; all those who were treated like children in the community. They have no influence to rely on, and can give you nothing in return when you welcome them in God’s name.



Jesus welcomes the children: Jesus MATA