

25th Sunday (B)

- Have you seen in films, or novels, or in real life, how people can be plotting their own position in the company when the head of the company is retiring or dying; how sometimes in families, they're already plotting how to get access to the greater wealth or more property as a parent is dying; or how clear it is in politics today as groupings within the party plot to overthrow the leader & vie for positions of power? It's always ugly!
- It's the story of how human beings from the beginning of time, have a tendency to muscle their way by connivance, cheating or charm to positions of power, prestige, wealth or status solely for their own benefit.
- Jesus was well aware of the constant temptation for the religious leaders in his own society to allow themselves to be conditioned by the surrounding social & political structures; he challenges it in today's gospel.
- He became aware that even his own disciples were disputing as to 'who is the greatest', so he decided to teach them a lesson in an extraordinarily gentle way by engaging in some counter-cultural street theatre that would have shocked them: acting out the message he wanted to get across.
- He took a child, not because he had some misty sentimental idea that all kids are little innocents, but because, in his society, children were absolutely at the bottom of the social scale.
- They were non-entities until adulthood, totally under the control of the father of the household; they had no social value, no rights.
- Jesus saw a young child hovering on the edge of the crowd & called the child into the middle of his group of disciples.
- That is, Jesus took an utter nobody, a non-entity, & moved him from the margins of society to the centre, challenging his disciples to change their perspective; this turns the whole social structure upside down.
- It subverts the whole idea of who is important & who is not & he revolutionises the notions of superiority & inferiority.
- Jesus is saying, 'Take the most vulnerable person in your society, make that person the centre of your attention, & change.
- Be prepared for some pain & turmoil in changing your perspective.'
- This is a powerful lesson: Greatness in the world – power, connections, wealth, influence, reputation & learning – only counts for something in the Kingdom of God when put at the service of the most vulnerable of our society.
- Greed, riches & pride are so alluring, so seductive for us in the Church, as much as for those outside it, that we need to regularly examine our consciences to assess the motivations & results of what we are doing, & why we are doing it.

- When I read today's Gospel, however, I also feel sad.
- I can't help but reflect on how unintentionally prophetic Mark was being in linking the prediction of Jesus' passion with the status of a child.
- The safeguards now needed in response to the criminal & scandalous behaviour of some leaders in the Church, means that many bishops, priests, religious & teachers can no longer follow Jesus' example & take children in our arms.
- I fully understand why this is the case, but the fact that we have to be so careful about the care of our children & have strict protocols & legislation that covers such behaviour toward children is a necessary &, nonetheless, tragic moment.
- It's also a moment for us to remember the pain of those who have had to endure the trauma of destructive behaviour.
- As the Jews say of the Holocaust, 'to forget is to commit the same mistake again'. At its most basic level the latter part of today's Gospel reveals what we would expect of Jesus – he likes children & they like him.
- It's amazing how the issues of our own time can sometimes change the way a scriptural story is read, & its importance for our lives today.
- The story of Jesus embracing the child in public was in itself a social challenge to accepted customs in his day, but it's much more than that.
- In taking the children in his arms, Jesus declares that they are possessions of no one, but they belong to us all as gifts - In the family of God, children are accorded the dignity & respect we would give to God.
- Today's Gospel tells us that those who deserve our attention & esteem are the ones who are the least, the most at risk or those who put their talents & gifts at their service by making the world a better place for them.
- A Church that primarily mixes with "important" people & associates with the powerful of the land, is perverting the Good News of God announced by Jesus.
- A Church that welcomes the "little ones", the powerless, the most vulnerable & weakest in our society, shows people how to welcome God.