

## Contexts

### Mark's Gospel

- Composed between 65-70 CE
- Generally accepted as the first Gospel written.
- Authorship is unclear but possibly written by John Mark, the companion of Peter in Rome.
- Begins with the ministry of John the Baptist in the wilderness, then the Baptism of Jesus, then Jesus battling the forces of evil in the wilderness.
- First action of Jesus is to establish a community to establish the kingdom of God.
- Major work of this community is the work of healing and restoring God's right order, as opposed to the order of Rome, or the order established by the scribes and Pharisees, or religious and cultural norms of the time.
- Cleansing & healing stories restore people to their proper (rightful) place in the Kingdom and in human society (no longer outcasts, despised, unclean, etc).
- The right order of God's kingdom shatters and goes beyond the human and religious limitations placed on some of God's beloved sons and daughters.
- There is a characteristic starkness in Mark's Gospel – it is the shortest of the 4 canonical Gospels.
- Often the story is told by contrast – who is truly blind: the blind beggar or the seeing disciples, etc.

### Mark 10:35-45 – things to notice

- Does not follow immediately from last Sunday's Gospel. The missing 5 verses are the 3<sup>rd</sup> prediction of his passion by Jesus.
- It is against this background that the sons of Zebedee come forward and make their request – does that strike you as strange?
- Better translation of their question is: We want you to do whatever we ask.
- Using Old Testament imagery of trial and suffering (cup & baptism) Jesus leads James & John to consider what they are asking.
- The confidence with which they answer, 'We can!'
- Jesus says, 'You will!' – a case of 'careful what you ask for'?
- Others are indignant (very angry) not because of the outrageous request James & John make, but because James & John got in first, or the others are angry because they didn't think of making the same request first!
- Jesus tries (again) to get the disciples to understand the true nature of his messiahship – not about power, position and wealth, but about service.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

This Gospel is part of the semi-continuous reading of Mark's Gospel. From 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time we are looking at that section of Mark which deals with the Mystery of the Son of Man and, in particular, the 'Way' of the Son of Man.

24<sup>th</sup> Sunday – Peter's confession of faith  
blind

30<sup>th</sup> Sunday – Jesus gives sight to the blind

25<sup>th</sup> Sunday – Passion & Resurrection prophesied [All Saints – Matthew's Beatitudes]

26<sup>th</sup> Sunday – Instructions for the disciples

32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday – The Widow's Mite

27<sup>th</sup> Sunday – Marriage & Divorce & little children

33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday – The last things

28<sup>th</sup> Sunday – the problem of wealth

Christ the King – The King

## 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday – the problem of authority & service

The first reading from the prophet Isaiah talks of God's suffering servant. In these passages we recognise Jesus as the servant who gives up his life in order that others may live. The reading helps us understand that just as the suffering of Jesus brought life to us, so our suffering can bring life to others. The Gospel reminds us that being a disciple is not about winning rewards like high places in the kingdom of God. It is not about power, status or wealth. It is about becoming servants, not masters, of our brothers and sisters and giving of ourselves that others may have life.

### Reflection

They're at it again! One might be forgiven for wondering just how slow the disciples are in getting Jesus' message. For weeks he has been instructing them about the Kingdom of God and the conversion of heart needed to be his followers.

This Sunday's Gospel episode shows that, yet again, they just don't get it. This time it is James and John, who together with Peter form the 'inner circle', the group of disciples closest to Jesus. James and John are asking for the highest places of honour when Jesus comes into his 'glory'.

In so many of the recent Gospels Jesus has insisted on the need to let go of self-interest, status, power and wealth. Using the example of children, regarded as powerless and unimportant in the ancient world, Jesus has tried to help the disciples understand that one cannot enter the Kingdom of God unless one welcomes it with the open-hearted enthusiasm of a child. He has also told them that the way of making the Kingdom present to others is by putting aside power, superiority and status and meeting the 'other' face-to-face, as one 'child' to another. Yet, here are a couple of ambitious disciples looking for places of honour, to be like princes, in the coming Kingdom.

While they understand that Jesus is the Messiah, they misunderstand what kind of Messiah he is and what kind of Kingdom he is bringing. While Jesus continues to talk about the path his own life will take through suffering, death and resurrection, the disciples are so focussed on themselves that they ignore his words.

Rather than brush aside the brash request of James and John, Jesus attempts to draw them deeper by hinting at the path of true discipleship. Using two biblical motifs, the cup (the fate that lies ahead of a person) and baptism (not the sacrament but the idea that undergoing trials and dangers is like passing through stormy, turbulent waters) Jesus asks if they can really commit to sharing his life and mission. Without hesitating they say, "We can," and Jesus affirms that they will. But, as for the places of honour, these are for the Father to assign.

The other ten disciples have been standing near by, eavesdropping on the conversation between Jesus, James and John. They are angry at hearing of their attempt to get in first and claim the seats of honour for themselves – no doubt, they would have liked to do the same!

Jesus takes the opportunity to tell them, yet again, that real greatness in the Kingdom of God lies in self-sacrificing service to humanity. Authority among the people of Christ is not to be exercised by 'lording it over' others or by using positions and capacities for self-serving ends. Authority is always to be at the service of and for the benefit of others. Disciples are called to be servants, not masters.

As we follow Jesus through the Gospel, we see that his 'authority' over demons, illness and death, as well as his teaching, always brings liberation, restores health and wholeness and sets others at rights with God and neighbour.

That is the pattern that he asks the disciples to follow. The only way to enter into Jesus' 'glory' is to follow him in self-sacrificing service of humanity, as one who gives up their life as a ransom for many.