



newspringtime
COMMUNITY

Commentary for 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time B 2024

This is the second & least detailed of the three passion predictions in Mark. Like the other predictions this one predicts that instead of being the political messiah of popular expectation the Son of Man will suffer and be vindicated by rising from the dead. Once again Mark emphasizes that the disciples failed to understand the import of Jesus' words. The apostle's discussion about who would be greatest, was influenced by the political messiah archetype. What Jesus advocated for true disciples of his was based on the suffering servant archetype. Not surprisingly, therefore, Mark follows the passion prediction with teaching about discipleship, by talking about the importance of humility. Jesus stressed the fact that the true disciple, in imitation of him, should be a servant of all (v. 35). The word for 'servant' here is perhaps better translated as 'slave'. The saying thus advocates a total reversal of the values of contemporary society. All that is regarded as valuable and admirable in our culture is called into question, and the Christian must adopt the role of the lowest and most despised member of the social community. As St Paul said in Phil 2:2-5, "I urge you, then, to make me completely happy by having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, and being one in soul and mind. Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble towards one another, always considering others better than yourselves. And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own. The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had." Jesus went on to illustrate what he meant by warmly embracing a child and saying that not only do children epitomize what he had in mind, they are to be loved and in loving them, the disciple loves Jesus himself who identifies with the innocence, vulnerability and powerlessness of children.

In 1896, St Therese of Lisieux wrote: "I want to seek out a means of going to heaven by a little way, a way that is very straight, very short and totally new. We are living now in an age of inventions, and we no longer have to take the trouble of climbing the stairs for, in the homes of the rich, an elevator has replaced these very successfully." Therese looked for a spiritual elevator, one that would take her reliably and easily into the presence of God. She believed that she discovered such an elevator when she focused on what her sister referred to as the way of "*spiritual childhood*." It was inspired by two texts in particular: "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven," (Mt 18:2-3) and "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth,

because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants" (Mt 11:25).

Therese believed that one should depend absolutely upon God the Father in an unquestioning way, and to regard everything that comes from his hand, good and bad alike, as a gift. As she used to say repeatedly, "Everything is a grace." Therese did not believe that she should remain childish, but rather that she should become, ever more childlike, ever more dependent upon the loving mercy of God. She explained: "To be a child is to recognize our nothingness, to expect everything from God as a little child expects everything from its father; it is to be disquieted about nothing....To be little is not attributing to oneself the virtues that one practices, believing oneself capable of anything, but to recognize that God places this treasure in the hands of his little child to be used when necessary; but it always remains God's treasure. Finally, it is not to become discouraged over one's faults, for children fall often, but they are too little to hurt themselves very much." I have long thought that this quotation not only sums up what Therese had in mind when she spoke about the little way as the way of spiritual childhood, it is also an inspired reflection on the meaning and implications of Christ's teaching in our Gospel.