



Contributed by Father Tim Uniac, C.R.

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TWENTY FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
September 19, 2021

GATHERING TIME
(10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

The word 'righteous' or 'righteousness' flows through the readings for today. Sometimes it is used to refer to a particular person, such as the 'righteous one,' and sometimes it refers to a positive quality found within a community, or sought by a community in greater abundance. From a faith perspective, what exactly *is* righteousness?

As a young boy in elementary school, I was taught that righteousness meant being in right standing with God, to be good in the eyes of God. This was, at least for me, a fearful image of God (or at the very least, a Santa Claus-type image of God) – it meant I had to behave myself or I will disappoint God, that I will not be pleasing in God's eyes. This really was a penitential image of God. It was this image of God, and this understanding of righteousness, that would lead our teachers to parade us over to the church on a regular basis for Confession. Simply put, righteousness meant ensuring at all cost that my relationship with God was in a good place. There was no mention about the role of faith in all of this, nor even any sense of having a healthy dependency upon God.

High school religious education would expand my understanding of righteousness a little further away from my fearful image of God. It was at this stage that I would begin to hear of righteousness as some kind of action verb. It was an act of being virtuous and honourable. This would find expression in the 'service projects' we were required to do in high school prior to graduation. Being of service to others, especially those who are vulnerable or in need, was a virtuous and honourable thing to do; it was the definition of righteousness.

While studying theology before ordination, another dynamic was added to my understanding of righteousness: morality. Righteousness includes the quality of being morally right or justifiable.

Literally, righteousness means to be right in a moral way, to obey and follow the commandments, for instance. All of humanity is somehow called to be righteous in the sense of being a good and honourable person who freely is of service to those in need. When we add faith to righteousness, it will also now include morality, being obedient to God, not as requirement, but because our faith and dependency upon God invites us to freely choose to follow God's laws and commands.

Warm-up Activity (about 8-10 minutes):

Because our readings for today all include some sense of servanthood, spend some time as a group preparing to address servanthood by coming up with some definitions for this concept.

What is servanthood?

What, or who, is a servant-leader?

What does Jesus mean when he calls us to be servants?

The Table of the Word

THEME: Talya

Word play, particularly when applied to the scriptures, can reveal some fascinating and powerful messages. For instance, in the Gospel for today, Jesus uses the Aramaic word "talya" which means 'child'. What is fascinating is that "talya" in Aramaic ALSO means 'servant'. Jesus' use of the word "talya" in this context can be no mistake on his part; it was used with a purpose. Jesus links together two meanings for the same word, child and servant. A child is the least and most vulnerable person in society; by linking child with servant, it appears Jesus is calling his Apostles to accept the responsibility of servanthood towards the least and most vulnerable in society – this is what will make one great in the Kingdom of God (Jesus' teaching was triggered by Apostles arguing over who was the greatest among them).

Leader: As disciples who follow Jesus on the way to the kingdom, let us seek the mercy and forgiveness of God necessary for this journey.

For the times we were unrighteous towards those in need,
For the times we sought to be first, rather than last of all,
For the times we failed to be like the child in our midst,

**Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray (together)

*O God, whose hand shelters the just and righteous,
and whose favour rests on the lowly,
banish hypocrisy from our hearts,
and purify us of all selfish ambition.
We pray this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God, we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering word, and that God is present in the word proclaimed. This is the word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the small Christian community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)*

FIRST READING (Wisdom 2:12, 17-20)

The godless say, "Let us lie in wait for the righteous one, who makes life inconvenient to us and opposes our actions; who reproaches us for sins against the law, and accuses us of sins against our training."

"Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life; for if the righteous one is God's son, God will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries."

"Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance. Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected."

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (James 3:16-4:3)

Beloved: Where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts.

You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Mark 9:30-37)

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

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house Jesus asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they were silent for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.

Jesus sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”

Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Lectio Divina means “sacred prayer through sacred reading.” It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This word proclaimed today is God's own word, God's way of speaking to you today through God's own Spirit. So take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this word you have just heard to touch you or soak into you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it and describe it in a few words.

COMMENTARY:

Wisdom. While this passage seems to be referring to the “insult and torture” that Jesus will ultimately undergo, the more probable explanation is that the plotting being suggested in this passage is actually directed towards the Prophet Jeremiah. Those plotting evil against the “righteous one” have grown intolerant of his message, a message that is “making life inconvenient” for them. Therefore, their desire is to silence this voice who has reproached them for their sinfulness. Ultimately, they hope that their torture of the “righteous one” will reveal him as an impostor whom God will disown.

James. Do not be deceived by the shortness of this passage, for it contains a powerful message relevant to this very day. James is addressing the evils at work within the early Christian community, evils that hold the potential to tear the community apart. For example, “envy” and “selfish ambition” will bring about “disorder” and “wickedness” within the community. How does the community counter the influence of evil? James invites them to seek “wisdom from above”. This wisdom will bring with it some amazing positive effects upon the community: peace, gentleness, mercy, etc. Then James offers a beautiful image of what this community will look like, if immersed in the wisdom that comes from above: there will be an abundant “harvest of righteousness”.

Mark. Jesus, as He teaches and instructs His Apostles today, makes clear that He wants the Apostles to be defined by their service. The Apostles are encouraged to draw upon the example of Jesus’ ministry of service, and to identify Jesus as their model, for He is the greatest of all servants. It is interesting that Jesus chooses this moment in time to speak to the Apostles about service. Why so? Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem – He has set His face toward Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, Jesus will surrender His very life as His final act of service; He will undergo public humiliation and execution. Jesus wants the Apostles to clearly understand the message of salvation that Jesus is revealing to the world, for they will be charged with the task of continuing Jesus’ mission and ministry following His death and resurrection. Are the Apostles ready to do what Jesus asks of them? Seemingly not, for they

are engaged in an argument as to which of them is the greatest. They still have much to learn before the events in Jerusalem unfold.

Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

“God will help him”

Those plotting against the righteous one in this passage have a number of issues. First, they do not believe him to be a “son” of God; second, they believe they personally have the ability to identify him as an impostor; and third, they do not believe God will help him when they condemn him and put him to death. These are the “godless” ones according to Wisdom. Self-righteousness and vanity can lead people to be blind to the truth right before them. The plotters in this passage are blind to the message being revealed right before their very eyes, for whatever reason they are unable to see the truth. Have you ever encountered someone like this, someone who believes they are right, even when the truth before them suggests otherwise? What feelings do people like this ignite within you?

James 3:16-4:3

“Wisdom from above is first pure”

If wisdom can bring forth a harvest of righteousness that results in peace, what do communities need to do better in order to make this a reality?

Mark 9:30-37

“Servant of all”

The disciples are struggling as they try to understand what it means to be servant of all, while their humanity causes them to argue over who is the greatest among them. This is a dilemma that many in leadership positions struggle over – how do you serve all with true humility, and a desire for the good of others, while at the same time receiving adulation, praise and power simply because you are a leader? What grace is needed to truly be a servant-leader? Who are some true servant-leaders that you can identify?

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

1. **Word of the Week:** *“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”*

2. **Suggestion for the Week:**

Spend some time this week praying and reflecting upon how you model servant-leadership, making yourself servant of all. You may or may not be surprised how often you place the needs of others before your own—this is servant-leadership! You may discover that plain human decency and kindness towards others makes servant-leadership easier. Hopefully, your prayerful reflection will lead you to the realization that your faith calls you to be servant of all, and God has already graced you with the gifts to carry out this ministry.

3. **Intercessions:** (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

Leader: Let us pray to God our helper, the Lord, the upholder of our life.

That all members of the church may imitate the example of Jesus, not seeking to be first but becoming servant of all, we pray to the Lord ...

That all nations may renounce conflicts and disputes; and realize that a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace, we pray to the Lord ...

That those who serve children in the name of Christ may teach all of us how to welcome Christ in simplicity of heart, we pray to the Lord ...

That victims of envy and selfish ambition may not lose faith but bear witness to the greater power of gentleness and peace, we pray to the Lord ...

That the dead who were God's children by baptism may rise again with Jesus to the joy of eternal life, we pray to the Lord ...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray (together)

*By your will, O God, revealed in Christ,
whoever wants to be first must become last of all,
and you have made a little child the measure of your kingdom.
Give us the wisdom to welcome the word of your Son,
and come to understand our call to be servants to all.
We ask through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever. Amen.*

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one,

OUR FATHER ...

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (**Celebrating the Word** was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R. deceased 2012). For information: **website:** www.resurrectionists.ca. **Email:** provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).