

Homily 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time (23.9.18)

## True greatness does not come from having power & influence over people, but consists in humble service

“Wherever you find jealousy and ambition, you find disharmony and wicked things of every kind”.

We know jealousy is bad, but ambition, we couldn't live without some ambition. Ambition gives us drive. So, I think James is on about a particular kind of ambition that is at the expense of everybody else. Jealousy and ambition. And it's more true to life than perhaps we first think when listening to it in this context because the first reading is clearly about jealousy and what sort of jealousy is it? It's the jealousy that sees someone else who is, for want of an expression, 'rather good'.

I don't know about you, whether you've ever bumped into anyone or met anyone who excels in sanctity and goodness. When you're in the presence of someone who is profoundly able and positive, you often feel your own smallness. In the first reading there, we see that this jealousy of that person makes them want to get rid of him or her, and that's so true to life, isn't it? Maybe we don't want to kill them but in a smaller way that reading applies to most of us - that when we're jealous of someone because of what they have or who they are, we find ourselves wanting to eradicate them from our lives because we compare. We compare ourselves and find ourselves wanting. And I have certainly felt that experience that makes you think,

"Oh, gosh. I can't be like them." And you may be in a bit of awe of them. I've never wanted to kill someone because of it, but I'm sure you know that the emotion is there. Well I say I have never wanted to kill, but my mother told me that when she held my new born sister in her hands one day I threw a knife at her, aged nearly 5, and said take that back to where it came from! Jealousy is, fortunately, something I've never really suffered from since then, but it is a passion that can overtake people at times or a lot of the time. And Saint James puts it down to the desires of our heart, which in other words, if our desires are all badly centred, then they overpower us. In one way we become a slave to them, and it makes us do actions we wouldn't want to do or have done to us.

But ambition is a thing that Jesus speaks of in the gospel. As I said, we need some ambition, but I find it very interesting in Mark's version, because he doesn't take this little child and say,

"Whoever wants to inherit the Kingdom of God must become like a little child." He is doing something else here. But I don't know whether you noticed the lovely little nuance,

"What were you arguing about, on the road?" And it says,

"Well, we were arguing who is the greatest." And there's a little touch, which tells you this is important, it says so He sat down and called the 12 to Him. Now Jesus was doing an action sitting down and calling His disciples around Him, like a rabbi would, acting as somebody in authority to give a profound teaching. So Jesus, in sitting down was actually saying,

"This is very important. I need you to listen to this." And so, he put some vision in a context. It says,

"If you want to become great, then you have to become servant of all."

So Jesus is saying something about ambition, that ambition is alright but it must focus on some form of service to society, to individuals. It must be an ambition to use one's gifts and talents and abilities, yes, to make money, to be a successful business person, but with care and concern for those we come into contact with through that ambition.

And then I love the way says he brings a little child and He says,

"Anyone who welcomes one of these children in my name welcomes me and the one who sent me." And why a child? Well, a child can't further anybody else's ambition in a way, they have nothing to give in that sense, they're also vulnerable, but also at the mercy of the adult in charge of them, all those dependency issues. And Jesus isn't just really making a reference to a child, He's making a reference to everybody who is in that position, the poor, the weak, the disabled, those in want. He's saying they are like a child who can't offer you anything back, well, other than love of course. But I meant in terms of promoting one's ambition and in saying that, if you look upon other people in their need, like you would upon your own child and how you would provide. Then that will temper your ambition, and your desires for the better.