

22 September 2024 - ^{25th} Sunday "B"

[Wis 2:12...20; Jas 3:16 - 4:3; Mk 9:30-37](#)

Homily

It is said that the emperor Napoleon, towards the end of his career but before his fall, after having exercised a good deal of 'power' during his lifetime, confided to one of his generals: *'Do you know what surprises me most in the world? - It's the inability of force to create anything. In the end -- he added -- the sword is always defeated by the spirit.*

Before him and after him, many have had the same experience. And yet, it is astonishing to see the fascination that power exerts on those who possess it as well as on those who do not, and even on those who are its victims.

The prophets of Israel seem to have been the first in human history to proclaim that power is not supreme, that the sword is an abomination, that violence is obscene. But it took several centuries for this intuition to gain ground. And the reading we have just heard from the Book of Wisdom, written in the second century BC, at a time when the Jews were still dreaming of restoring their political power, gives us an example of the moral effects of such a thirst for power: *'Let us lure the righteous into a snare, for he vexes us.... Let us subject him to insults and torments... Let us condemn him to an infamous death...'*

James, in the second reading, warns us of the same danger and explains its source: *'Where do wars come from, where do conflicts among you come from? Is it not precisely from all these instincts that are fighting within you? -- Conflicts between men always come from conflicts in the hearts of individuals, and ultimately from the thirst for power that is in some way innate in us.*

The Apostles themselves did not escape this. We have an example of this in today's Gospel. As we approach the end of the liturgical year, the Sunday Gospels give us a foretaste of the nearness of Jesus' death. In today's text, we find the second announcement of his Passion. And what do the disciples do immediately after this announcement? It's incredible, but they are arguing among themselves about who is the greatest, and no doubt who will be the prime minister in the new kingdom established by Jesus, who will soon proclaim himself the Messiah-King of Israel. They really haven't understood anything yet. And the most tragic thing is that they will do the same thing again after Jesus announces his Passion for the third time, on

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the very eve of his death. It's so difficult to swap dreams for reality.

Jesus took the opportunity to continue training his disciples. He gave them the example of a little child. The characteristic of a child is not to be important and therefore -- at least until the first wounds of life have made him fearful or suspicious -- to be totally open to everything that is given to him; to receive everything as a gift, without having any rights to assert or defend. This is the level of spontaneous love, not of rights.

This is also the level at which service takes place, to which Jesus exhorts his disciples: *'If anyone wishes to be first, let him be... the servant of all.'* Life together, whether the life of a married couple or the life of a monastic community, is founded on mutual service: help that we give each other in our pursuit of God and our ongoing conversion, but which must be expressed through daily services of a material and very practical nature.

In calling us to serve one another, Jesus is calling us to the level of gratuitous love. When, in community life - or in the life of a couple - we begin to claim our rights, we choose a plan other than that chosen by Jesus. Communion is built not through the exercise of power but through gratuitous mutual service, a sign of the love that God has for us and that he calls us to have for one another.

Armand VEILLEUX