

Our Journey with and to God Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time/B
September 20, 2015 9:00 AM Wis 2:12, 17-20; Jas 3:16—4:3; **Mk 9:30-37** (Life is about becoming more aware of God and God's love for us.)

Today we hear of Jesus and his disciples on a journey, and that idea of a journey is a common template in the Bible from the time of Abraham onward because **our lives are journeys**. We are constructed that way, to be on the journey all the time, whether we actually go anywhere geographically or not. So this is a model for us. We too are on a journey, and—and—**Jesus is with us teaching us**. It's most important we understand this: Jesus is with us teaching us along the way. Perhaps from time to time **we need to pause and listen**. In fact, **God has begun our own journey. They begin with God and they end with God**. The difference is in the beginning of our journeys we are not aware of where we are going or with whom. **So life is about becoming more aware of God and God's love for us** and of our willingness to embrace it and be filled with it and to recognize **it is the only thing that will ever make us happy** because we are created for it and for God, for him.

This realization doesn't come easily. Naturally we are placed on a planet with all kinds of opportunities and we get going and we start all kinds of projects and we do all kinds of things, mostly for the better, but **sometimes our experiences and our accomplishments become distractions and lead us away from the real goal of life**. They are, after all, not the ultimate goal. No matter how important they may seem, they cannot be. Even more, we often take ourselves wrongly; **we don't understand who we are**. We believe what the world tells us. We believe even what our families tell us, but that isn't really what God tells us, too often. Too often it isn't. That is the specific topic of today's gospel lesson. **Who are we?**

Mark says that **Jesus** is now teaching his disciples about his eventual betrayal, his loss of friends, his passion and death, and even his resurrection. **He is talking about his own life as he sees it unfolding in front of him, but they don't get it**. They don't understand what he is talking about. That's not blameworthy; the problem was **they were afraid to ask him**. That isn't good because **Jesus' whole effort was always to establish friendship and communication**. He was always about love, and love is inviting and fear is not. It's the opposite. Fear is stopping communication. **Fear is rejecting communication**. So they are not really where he wants them, where he is trying to get them.

They are fighting along the way. Ironically—ironically—as **he is talking about his impending gift of self, they are talking about self-importance**. These are two diametrically opposed ways of being. Jesus is talking about giving self away. That's what God is all about. "Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped," but let go of himself, poured himself out, gave himself away. This is his way of being. This is God's way of being. **The disciples, on the other hand, are about preserving and protecting and building up that self, not giving it away**, holding it in, holding it up, comparing it with others.

We have to admit this is something we all tend to do. **We tend to compare ourselves with others because of course we don't know who we are**. We look at ourselves from the world's perspective trying to promote our own importance or our own value in a sort of competitive spirit. However, if the journey is to God and to union and communion with the

whole creation, then a competitive spirit is counterproductive. It goes against our own best interests. **Our best interests are served by merging them with the best interests of everyone else.** And that's what Jesus is trying to get his disciples to see. **So the only competition would have to be in serving and loving and giving oneself in the greatest possible measure.** And that's what he says, "The greatest will be the one who is servant of all." That makes perfect sense from what he is trying to teach and live. So therefore what we see in the world: **egocentricity, self-centeredness, selfishness, self-interest, all those things, tribalism, nationalism, all of it is an enormous waste of time.** And just think for a moment how much time and how much energy is wasted as the world turns.

So the whole story now hinges on this child that Jesus brings into the midst. **He used a child because he wants to stress that there is absolutely nothing we need to do to attain the love he is talking about.** The child is already loved from the moment of conception, and loved infinitely, not because the child does anything. **It's because the child is God's.**

Naturally in life we want to accomplish things. We are put on this kind of a planet where that's appropriate. We have responsibilities, and we need to do our best to accomplish them. **The problem comes when we think that anything we do or anything we have is going to make us happy.** They cannot, not really, maybe content for a short time. But **we are, in fact, made for infinite happiness;** nothing we do, nothing we have, will ever provide it. It can't. And when we think it has or will, we have created an idol. That's what idolatry is. St. Thomas Aquinas says **there are four basic false gods: wealth, power, pleasure, and fame—the most common idols we make.** None of them can make us happy. **None of them has ever made anyone happy.**

But this child already possesses inside this perfect happiness, but she doesn't know it, not yet. But even a child is instinctively capable of opening herself or himself to love, and has very little trouble doing that. "The kingdom of God is made for just such as these." **To be human means that the image of God lies within us.** And when we get in touch with it, love and peace and joy and goodness can come out of us and radiate forth. That is what the journey is about, letting that come about. So he placed a child so that they can see the love in the child, which perhaps a child herself doesn't see—perhaps. And then **when we start to see that love in the child, we can also see love elsewhere, eventually, hopefully, everywhere and in everyone, even in our enemies.** That was Jesus' teaching. It takes some time. It takes a lot of quiet and a lot of patience, but it can happen. We dialogue with this love. **We listen to this love. We let it change us.**

In fact, **finding God in others and finding God in the Eucharist are part of the very same thing.** How sad it is that so many people don't find God in the Eucharist! Well, that's part of the blindness that it is very common on our planet. **The union or communion with God and with the whole of creation, which is what we are aiming at, the goal of life, we celebrate every time we gather for the Eucharist.** Not only do we celebrate it, **we anticipate it.** We participate in it in a mysterious way. And this is why we call it "the source and summit of our worship." What it anticipates and promotes is what St. Paul called **"God becoming all in all."** Our vocation is to help that along.