



First in Line

2nd Wednesday in Lent

Mark 9:33-37

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

It can be so embarrassing to get caught and Jesus had caught the disciples. “What were you arguing about on the way?” he asked them now that they had arrived at their destination. And they were struck dumb with embarrassment. They never intended him to overhear their conversation because whether they would admit it or not, they knew that the topic of their conversation was in direct conflict with Jesus’ own teaching. Jesus had been telling them and all who would hear: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” But they had been arguing over places of honor and greatness in the coming kingdom—cabinet positions, ambassadorships, whatever. It was as if they had not been listening at all.

Patently Jesus explains that the values of the kingdom he had come to inaugurate were opposite from the prevailing ones of the culture. In the Kingdom of God, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” Greatness is measured in terms of the service one is graced to render, not in terms of the service one is entitled to demand. The ones our culture consider as great are those who have made it the top of the ladder, not the one standing at the foot of the ladder so that others can climb. Jesus does not despise the desire to be first, he simply redefines it in terms that stand the world’s ordering of things on its head and challenges every assumption we have made about achievement.

Prayer:

In this day, O Lord, help me to live as one whose values and priorities are Kingdom oriented. Amen.