

## Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, May 29th 2013

Three times, on the road to Jerusalem, Jesus speaks to his disciples about his coming death and resurrection. Each time, they are clueless in their response. The first time, Mark simply says that Peter “rebukes Jesus.” Apparently, he rejects the reference to rejection and murder. The second time, Mark says, “They didn’t understand and were afraid to question him.” Even worse, they soon begin to argue about which of them is “the greatest”!

In today’s gospel reading, we hear Jesus give the fullest prediction of all: “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him, spit upon him, and scourge him and put him to death, but after three days he will rise.” This time their response is more inappropriate than ever. The brothers Zebedee, apparently hearing something positive in the reference to “rising,” ask to be granted to sit at Jesus’ right and left in his glory. As in the first two efforts to communicate with his followers the implications of being his disciples, Jesus tries once more to teach them what is entailed in being his disciples.

Jesus chooses his words carefully. “You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones make their authority over them felt.” “The Gentiles,” of course, are the same Gentiles mentioned in the third passion prediction, the ones who will put Jesus to death--the Roman authorities, like Pilate, and the soldiers acting under the authority of the Emperor. They “are supposed to rule” but in fact (and here come some nasty seven-syllable words in the Greek) they *katakyrieuousin* (“dominate in an oppressive way”) and their *megales* (“Great Ones”) *katexousiazousin* (“tyrannize”) them. This is a quick way of characterizing how the Romans achieved what they called the *pax romana*, “the Roman Peace”—actually a kind of social order that is achieved by violent domination. “But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be a great one among you must be your servant”—clearly another way of achieving community. And to further characterize the kind of relationships entailed in that kind of ruling, Jesus boldly proceeds to use the language of the slave market: “And whoever should be first among you must be slave of all (yes, the word is *doulos*, the ordinary word for the lowest person in Roman society, a slave). “For the Son of man”—the mysterious self-reference Jesus has been using in the three passion predictions —“did not come to be served (like Emperor) but to serve and to give his life as a ransom (*lytron*, the price paid to acquire, or liberate, a slave) for many.”

So the way of life that comes from following Jesus is the opposite of the *Pax Romana*. Rather, the *Pax Christi*, the peace that Jesus teaches, is achieved through service and nonviolence.

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