

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Mar 15th 2017

The scripture readings for the earlier weeks of Lent offer various calls to conversion, to repentance, to living a new life. Today's scriptures interrupt that steady stream to point to what lies ahead: the passion and death of Jesus.

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus takes the Twelve aside by themselves to deliver an important message: "The Son of Man will be handed over . . . mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised . . ." As though not noticing this solemn announcement, the gospel next records a mother's request that her sons should receive a favored place in Jesus' kingdom. Then we are told about the offense taken by the other ten in response to this bold request.

Jesus has just announced that he will die a violent death and then be raised, and no one seems to notice. Though Jesus' continuing reference to this death eventually penetrates the disciples' minds, their lack of understanding of its significance continues right up to and including the death of Jesus on the Cross. They fail to see that this death will be "a ransom for many."

This conflict between Jesus' insistence on the necessity of his death and the resistance to grasping its significance on the part of his followers opens us to the central contradiction preached by Jesus in word and in deed: dying is the path to life. The struggle to hear this message and to stake our lives on it is our challenge this Lent as well. Saying yes to a time of prayer instead of another entertainment presents a challenge. It costs something to be more sparing in our enjoyment of food or other pleasures. Making time to be with someone who needs our time, our love and our attention means saying no to some other activity. In all of these, we are called to trust that Jesus' way, his life's pattern, is indeed the path to life. May we allow Jesus to accompany us along the way so that his dying and rising might be in us.

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