

TRINITY 16/ORD 25  
Wisdom 2:12;17-20  
James 3:16-4:3  
Mk 9:30-37

In a letter to Bp Creighton, Lord Acton said that, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Power is seductive and leads to the view that might is right. When self-centred and godless groups strive for power they will persecute the honest and godly in order to test the strength of their faith just as Job's faith was tested. The denial of free speech and the removal of conscientious objection through legislative measures are current examples of persecution in Western societies. The Book of Wisdom contains such observations in today's first reading.

The Epistle of James states that disorder in the Church does not come from God but from self-centred ambition.

There was disorder among Jesus' disciples when for the second time, he told them that he the Messiah, and they his disciples, would suffer as a result of his ministry. This disturbance led the disciples to argue about who among them is the greatest. The issue was the 'management structure in the group, or to put it bluntly, the pecking order. Jesus then begins to spell out the nature of discipleship and what he said was once again the opposite to what worldly thinking human beings expected it to be. Jesus doesn't say to them, "Whoever wants to be first **must** be last," but "Whoever wants to be first **will** be last." This is the new pecking order – self-aggrandisement or false humility has no place in the Kingdom of God or the Church for that matter.

It is our cooperation with God's grace that will save us. We human beings cannot save ourselves. Only God with our trust and obedience to him can do that. Jesus then uses children as a visual aid. In the ancient world, children were virtually non-persons. Fewer than half of them survived beyond the age of 5. Those who survived were not recognised as full human beings. Yet despite this they were considered to be closer to the gods than adults were. Jesus then goes on to say that these young non-persons are bearers of the divine presence when they are welcomed in his name, because if they and he are welcomed, so is the one who has sent him. Jesus may be hinting that the disciples themselves are also God's little ones and to welcome them is to welcome him and his Father. Jesus message is clear that a community in which weak and feeble non-persons are not welcomed is a community without the presence of God.

In our time there are arguments about when human life begins. Is this at conception, when a heartbeat is detected or at birth or when the child's mother gives the child permission to live? Only then does the child become a person in law. Instead of offering dignified loving palliative care to the dying, euthanasia is to be suggested as the is the quick, cheap, preferred face of compassion. This opens the door to future legislation that regards the aged, the physically and mentally frail, or even the unproductive as non-persons whose moral duty is to request 'self-deliverance' for the greater good of those still acknowledged to be persons. What begins as a voluntary 'right' soon becomes a 'duty.'

Within the Church itself, division exists over what is the only right and true form of worship for Catholics to use. There are divisions about whether the Church should change its teaching to embrace the moral views of Western Culture in order to regain relevance in that culture. This war will be played out in the Plenary Council sessions next month. S D Levitt reminds us that, "Being confident you are right is not the same as being right," or as Albert Camus more pointedly said, "The need to be right is the sign of a vulgar mind."

We are being tested by Satan as Job was tested. The issues we face are diversions designed to divert us from our mission to proclaim Jesus as Lord and make the implications of this good news visible to all. Resist temptation, keep the Faith and Share it too.

Msgr Harry Entwistle  
Sept 2021