

Mark 9:30-37^{vi vii}

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. 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 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."

^{vi} About Mark 9:30-37

Today's reading begins a period of private ministry as Jesus concentrates on teaching the disciples. It includes the second of the three predictions of the passion in Mark (8:31; 10:32-34), the briefest of the three. As in the others, the prediction confuses the disciples, so Jesus teaches them about discipleship.

The mention of the resurrection in the predictions indicates clearly that, despite the lack of any account of resurrection appearances in the original ending of this gospel, the evangelist has no doubt of the fact and meaning of the resurrection. The disciples are typically dull, and they proceed to argue about their relative status in the kingdom.

Jesus responds with a paradox and an enacted parable. As he will achieve lordship only through the path of suffering, so his disciples must follow him in suffering and in service. In Jesus' culture, children were not idealized. Like women, they were of secondary importance. Thus, receiving a child as though he or she were Jesus enjoins upon the Christian community openness to all the lowly and rejected, for in Hebrew practice, the envoy of someone was to be treated as that very person.

vii **Reflection and Response**

As Jesus probes the anger and denial of his disciples in today's gospel, his question comes to us: What concerns are closest to our hearts? Do we, too, fret over status, authority or a lack of perks we think we deserve? Are we engaged in the disciples' game of comparison?

We envy and can't obtain, so we quarrel.

From our painful attempts at acquisition, we know the truth of this stark statement. Jesus' finger points at us as well as at his companions. But by the same token, he offers us the same remedy. Into our midst, he plunks the same disheveled, impish and probably grubby child. And if we're honest, we ask, "What does this kid have to do with theological discourse? Who invited her?"

Jesus invited her. And if Jesus invited her, then the child must have something to tell us. The child who has no bank account, no learned degrees, no office staff and no expertise has everything. In her total vulnerability, she is wrapped by the arms of Christ. She enjoys a peace for which the contentious disciples would weep with desire.