

The teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, in these readings, follows on from Mark chapter 8, verses 31– 38 and Mark chapter 9, verses 30 – 37 (Readings for 15th and 22th of September). If we read these verses first we will see the continuity of the Lord's teaching to his disciples.

The Readings for 13th and 20th October follow:-

The Encounter:- Mark 10, verses 17 – 22; The Rich Young Man

The first impression given by this youngster is that he is a bit of a show-off! Running up, falling on his knees and addressing Jesus as “Good Teacher”. In Matthew's Gospel he is recorded as saying “. . . *what good deed must I do to inherit eternal life?*” (Matthew 19, verse 16).

In his approach to Jesus, it may be that he realises that external obedience is not enough. He has kept the letter of the Law all his life, and he saw something in the Lord Jesus Christ that was lacking in his own life. “*Jesus, looked at him, and loved him.*” (verse 21). The word used here for “love” is “agapeo” - signifying a deep compassionate regard for the individual. Now the Lord puts his finger on the one thing that is holding back the spiritual life of the young man. Christian discipleship is always costly! In this case it is dependence on worldly treasure which is the problem. An unwillingness to break free and give his all to following the Lord Jesus.

The Teaching:- Mark 10, verses 23 – 31; The cost of discipleship

This is a continuation of the teaching in verses 13 – 16 of this chapter and deals with the need for single mindedness in those seeking to enter the kingdom of God. As back in verse 15, which refers to the single mindedness of a child, so here dependence on worldly goods are a barrier to serving the Lord Jesus Christ. I think verse 25 refers to a literal camel and a literal needle! There is no need to try to mitigate the impact of the original teaching! We must not miss the utterly serious truth that it expresses.

The disciples understand that it is not just excess riches that hinder salvation! It is so easy to have a dependence on earthly things, rather than a single minded seeking of the kingdom and a desire to follow Jesus. The response of Peter to Jesus is to affirm their dependence on him and their sacrifice of abandoning earthly things: see Mark chapter 1, verses 16 – 20. The promise of great rewards both now and through eternity are an encouragement. However there are solemn warnings! The blessings will come with the possibility of persecutions and the Lord's “pecking order” may not be what we expect!

Mark chapter 10, verses 35 – 45 - The Disciples James and John seek preferment:-

Read Mark chapter 10, verses 32 – 34 to appreciate the context. ; The comment in Luke's Gospel, chapter 9, verse 51 is appropriate here - “*when the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*” The very fact that Jesus was walking ahead of his disciples sets the scene.

On this occasion he did not walk with them but led the way. He knew where he was going and why!

The Encounter:- Mark 10, verses 35 – 40;

It must have been the promise of the resurrection at the end of verse 34 that inspired James and John to approach Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel it is their mother that takes the initiative! (Matthew 20, verse 20) She is another one coming to Jesus and kneeling to make a request (see last week's reading: Mark 10, verse 17). Whoever takes the initiative, the conversation which follows is between Jesus, and James and John the disciples.

It seems that there was still an expectation on the part of (at least some of) the disciples that the Jesus as the Messiah would come into his earthly kingdom when they arrived in Jerusalem. James and John, who already held a privileged position in the group (see for example Mark 5, verse 37 and Mark 9, verse 2), asked for places of

pre-eminence – to sit on the right hand and left hand of the king!

In verses 38 – 40, the personal remarks of the Lord to James and John show that the honours they ask for are not to be handed out as favours to friends – no “Honours List” for favourites in the Kingdom of God! The disciples of Christ must be prepared to follow him in his trials, sufferings and death if they are to have entry into the Kingdom of Heaven, see Matthew 10, verses 38 - 39. In Gethsemane Jesus spoke of his death as a “cup” (Mark 14, verse 36) and his “baptism” as a figure for suffering and death (Luke 12, verse 50).

The Teaching:- Mark 10, verses 41 – 45; This sorry spectacle of selfish ambition became an occasion for the Lord to re-emphasize the nature of true greatness. The disciples had already been discussing among themselves who was greatest (see Mark 9, verse 34). Leadership in the Body of Christ, the Church, is not to follow the pattern laid down by the “Gentiles” - the worldly rulers! Jesus himself was the supreme example of one who manifested true greatness. He could have asserted his right to be ministered to by men. Instead he came “. . . *to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” The word used here for “ransom” was in common usage in everyday Greek at the time of Jesus. It referred to the price paid to free a slave. This was the price demanded by a holy God in order that justice may be satisfied in the forgiveness of sins. As a result of this payment the believer is freed from sin and Satan.

Read Philippians chapter 2, verses 5 – 11.

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