

Welcoming the Child Within

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time year B

Mark 9:30-37

This episode sounds like the family vacation.
Jesus and Peter, James and John arrive in Capernaum.
Jesus turns to them and asks,

“What were you arguing about on the way?”

It is like Mom turning to the back seat,

“What is the problem? What are you arguing about?!?”

And, like kids who know they have done stupidly wrong,
the disciples “remain silent”.

I can just see their heads lowered in shame.

Jesus knows the content of their futile discussion.

They had been discussing who was “the greatest”.

It was indeed a futile discussion.

Why?

Because, to God, to Jesus, we are *all* the greatest, each one of us.

This does not mean, of course,

- that we do not have issues
- that we do not need to try to get our act together
- that we do not have baggage that we need to surrender to God daily

It means that we are loved unconditionally,

and that our very existence brings God joy.

Jesus could have spoken to them as He did in last week’s incident,

in which he told Peter that he was thinking as do human beings and not God.

Human beings tend to compare and get entrapped in games of popularity.

Indeed, human beings create *celebrity*.

Really, when you think about it:

what is it with the adulation of people whom we do not even know?

How far we wander from the perspective of God...

The Holy Spirit would like to refashion our hearts and minds,

and give us real perspective.

Indeed, Jesus speaks of welcoming “in his name”, i.e. moved by God.

What perspective would the Holy Spirit like to give us?

He would like to give the perspective that Jesus reveals in this incident.

The greatest in the eyes of God is the one with the greatest love

—not the one with the coolest car or iPhone, or the most beautiful physique.

God reads that which no magazine cover can capture: *hearts*.
The greatest is the one who pours forth his/her heart in service.

Jesus then does something interesting, in the presence of the Twelve.
He takes a child and places him in their midst, and then hugs the child.
Jesus reveals his special closeness with children,
and with those *like children*, i.e. the vulnerable.
Jesus reveals that he is so close to children that,
if we receive a child “in His name”—again, moved by God, we receive Him.
And, in receiving Him, we receive the Father, the One who sent Him.
Caring openness of heart, receptivity, leads all the way to the heart of God.
Jesus reveals to his disciples a special pathway to God,
a pathway sometimes difficult for us to grasp.
In the midst of being “big”: big on the football field, big at the office,
big behind the steering wheel, big in the kitchen, big in dealing with life,
we are to have another disposition of heart.

Think of the care and sensitivity and focus
with which we normally receive a child.

The Holy Spirit would like to refashion our hearts and minds in this way,
so much so that we encounter God

- in children
- in the disabled
- in *all* who are vulnerable *and*
- in what is vulnerable in us

Imagine that: encountering God in what is vulnerable in us
—you know, the parts of us that we flee!

Thus, we are, with God’s help, to welcome the child within,
to encounter God in those parts of ourselves that are vulnerable:

- there where we are afraid
- there where we repeatedly fall
- there where we are exhausted

This is a hopeful gospel—demanding, but hopeful.

We are great because God does not make junk.

We are great because we are encountered—if we so desire—by a great God
in those who are vulnerable and in that which is vulnerable in us.

That which the world so often considers lacking in greatness
is the vehicle whereby God communicates his greatness and sets us free:
children, the poor, the disabled, *us* in our own poverty.

There is so much hope..!
God's love is truly victorious.