

- A somewhat shorter homily today as all the deacons are on retreat and we also have a blessing of our catechists today—for whom we are very thankful, as they lead our children toward greater faith and discipleship.
- As Jesus says: “...*he who...*[teaches the commandments] *shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*” (Mat 5:19 RSV)

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- Now, in this Gospel today, in many ways on of the characteristics of humanity.
  - As you know, the Jews—and the apostles—envisioned that their Messiah would be an earthly military ruler—like Kings David or Solomon—who would establish a kingdom, and defeat and eject the foreign occupiers of Israel.
  - But Jesus, who is the Messiah, has other plans.
  - His plan is not an earthly kingdom, but rather the Heavenly one—which we enter by His words today “*If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.*” It is a kingdom reached only by service and humility.
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  - Now, the apostles do believe He is the Messiah, and yet, even though Jesus tells them in our Gospel that He would have to suffer and die...they ignore what He tells them and rather cling to what they want to believe.

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- That tends to be the way of our humanity?...despite evidence, we tend to believe what we want to believe.
  - For instance, I’ve talked to many mothers whose sons had robbed them blind for drugs or drink, or were in jail on serious charges...“But Father...he’s really a good boy.”
  - In our faith, despite what Jesus or the scriptures may actually teach us, we tend to minge it with what we want to believe.

- That's gone both ways in the past. Probably more often there has been a strong focus on sin, severity and the wrath of God... viewing God with His hand poised to squash us at any fault.
- That reflected what was in society—in the age of kings and emperors, people naturally associated God in a like manner.
- In our own day, God is often imagined in the opposite extreme—as the super-indulgent parent who never holds His child responsible for his actions.
- I often wonder whether that reflects our vision of society in our own day—democracy, the rule of the majority, the general avoidance of personal responsibility, etc.

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- And so...is God the heavy-handed wrathful tyrant...or is God rather that super-indulgent parent?
  - As with so many things, reality rests somewhere between the two.
  - Yes, God does love us beyond all our imagining; that is unmistakable in scripture...and He forgives us so very readily if we are truly repentant for disobedience of His teaching. He is the Father of the Prodigal Son (or daughter) waiting to welcome us home.
  - And yet He does hold us responsible for what we do...most especially if we ignore the Good and do what is wrong—that which is against His teaching...in the scripture and in the Church.
  - Many persons focus on the God's love in scripture, and yet conveniently omit that which points to personal responsibility and obligation to obey Him...Our Father and Creator.
  - But all of scripture is God's Word, and we must be honest and sober in our assessment of it.
  - It's like studying math; you can't just say "I don't like this part" and expect it to never come up. As mathematics describes the natural world, scripture describes the spiritual world.

- Likewise, we cannot ignore the other things that Jesus said...like “...*the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many... the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*” (Matt 7:13-14 RSV)
- Or, when Jesus tells His disciples: “*If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it...For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done.*” (Matthew 16:24-27 RSV)...a theme echoed throughout all of scripture.
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- So we must resist the temptation that St. Paul so often warns us about—to be slaves to our passions rather to the will of God...as a child tends to follow his own passions rather than the wisdom and guidance of his parents.
- As the saying goes: “*The truly strong man [or woman] is the one who rules himself*”...meaning having control over himself through reason and love of God rather than be swayed by his fleeting and unthinking passions.
- This is the self-discipline and wisdom which lead us to a holy and virtuous life.

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- ...because God truly loves us beyond all imagining: “*Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you.*” (Isaiah 49:15 NAB)
  - ...but we must not be like the apostles in our Gospel today—imagining Jesus to be what He is not, and to do what He will not.
  - We must hear all that He says...and thus the vital importance of reading of the Gospels and the scripture—especially the New Testament.

- Follow Jesus with eyes and ears wide open—not selectively omitting what is given to us, nor adding what is not there.
- ...for we can imagine Jesus echoing the words of Moses:
- *“Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as the LORD my God commanded me...Keep them and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding...For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?...you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul...”* (Deuteronomy 4:5-31 RSV)

Reading 1

[Wis 2:12, 17-20](#)

The wicked say:

Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us;  
he sets himself against our doings,  
reproaches us for transgressions of the law  
and charges us with violations of our training.

Let us see whether his words be true;  
let us find out what will happen to him.

For if the just one be the son of God, God will defend him  
and deliver him from the hand of his foes.

With revilement and torture let us put the just one to the test  
that we may have proof of his gentleness  
and try his patience.

Let us condemn him to a shameful death;  
for according to his own words, God will take care of him.

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 54:3-4, 5, 6 and 8](#)

R. (6b)**The Lord upholds my life.**

O God, by your name save me,  
and by your might defend my cause.

O God, hear my prayer;  
hearken to the words of my mouth.

R. **The Lord upholds my life.**

For the haughty men have risen up against me,  
the ruthless seek my life;  
they set not God before their eyes.

R. **The Lord upholds my life.**

Behold, God is my helper;  
the Lord sustains my life.

Freely will I offer you sacrifice;  
I will praise your name, O LORD, for its goodness.

R. **The Lord upholds my life.**

Reading II

[Jas 3:16-4:3](#)

Beloved:

Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist,  
there is disorder and every foul practice.

But the wisdom from above is first of all pure,  
then peaceable, gentle, compliant,  
full of mercy and good fruits,  
without inconstancy or insincerity.

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace  
for those who cultivate peace.

Where do the wars  
and where do the conflicts among you come from?  
Is it not from your passions  
that make war within your members?  
You covet but do not possess.  
You kill and envy but you cannot obtain;  
you fight and wage war.  
You do not possess because you do not ask.  
You ask but do not receive,  
because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Gospel

[Mk 9:30-37](#)

Jesus and his disciples left from there and began a journey through Galilee,  
but he did not wish anyone to know about it.  
He was teaching his disciples and telling them,  
“The Son of Man is to be handed over to men  
and they will kill him,  
and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise.”  
But they did not understand the saying,  
and they were afraid to question him.

They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house,  
he began to ask them,  
“What were you arguing about on the way?”  
But they remained silent.  
They had been discussing among themselves on the way  
who was the greatest.  
Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them,  
“If anyone wishes to be first,  
he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.”  
Taking a child, he placed it in the their midst,  
and putting his arms around it, he said to them,  
“Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me;  
and whoever receives me,  
receives not me but the One who sent me.”