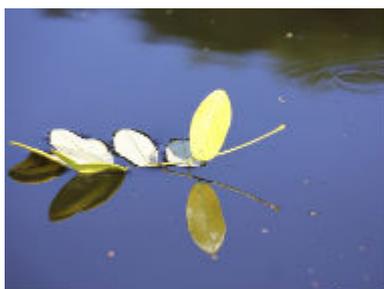


Friday of Lent Week 2



In today's gospel Jesus takes his close disciples aside and warns them of the fate soon awaiting him and them in Jerusalem. Immediately we are then told that the mother of two of them approached him with her sons, did homage and asked him to give them a good job in his new administration after he came to power.

The disparity in understanding and spiritual intelligence is quite startling and it probably hasn't improved much in the two millennia since. We blank out what we don't want to hear and we push our own agenda when we can.

Jesus handles her rather gently in the circumstances ? and also the other ten disciples who are jealous when they hear of the woman's lobbying. Their teacher's response reiterates his core teaching on the renunciation of power and status in all human relations: *whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave.*

Perhaps those who hold power in institutions can only really experience the truth expressed in these words when they resign. The medieval popes called themselves the 'servant of the servants of God' which sounds good except no one believed it. Power remains the great temptation. Hierarchy, which embeds power, is the antithesis of the spiritual life.

True spiritual practice continuously brings us down to earth, where everyone else is standing. It scorns pomp and circumstance, intrigue and false piety. Lent should naturally be a special time for promotion of social justice through contemplative practice. Perhaps it is fitting, then, that the princes of the Catholic Church are assembling to elect a new successor to Peter in this of all seasons.

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