

## GOSPEL

MARK 9:30-37

After leaving the mountain Jesus and his disciples made their way through Galilee; and he did not want anyone to know, because he was instructing his disciples; he was telling them, 'The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men; they will put him to death; and three days after he has been put to death he will rise again.' But they did not understand what he said and were afraid to ask him.

They came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the road?' They said nothing because they had been arguing which of them was the greatest. So he sat down, called the Twelve to him and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all.' He then took a little child, set him in front of them, put his arms round him, and said to them, 'Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'

## A REFLECTION BY POPE BENEDICT

On our way through St Mark's Gospel last Sunday we entered the second part, that is, the last journey towards Jerusalem and towards the culmination of Jesus' mission. After Peter, on the disciples' behalf, had professed his faith in him, recognizing him as the Messiah (cf. Mk 8:29), Jesus began to speak openly of what was going to happen to him at the end. The Evangelist records three successive predictions of his death and resurrection in chapters 8, 9 and 10. In them Jesus announces ever more clearly the destiny that awaits him and the intrinsic need for it. This Sunday's passage contains the second of these announcements. Jesus says: "The Son of man" — an expression that designates himself — will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise". "But" the disciples "did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask him".

In fact, on reading this part of Mark's account the great inner distance that existed between Jesus and his disciples is clearly apparent; they are, so to speak, on two different wavelengths so that the Teacher's discourses are either not understood, or are only superficially understood. Straight after professing his faith in Jesus, the Apostle Peter takes the liberty of reproaching the Lord because he predicted that he was to be rejected and killed.

After the second prediction of the passion, the disciples began to discuss with one another who was the greatest among them, and after the third, James and John asked Jesus to sit one at his right hand and one at his left when he would come into glory (cf. Mk 10:35-40). However, there are various other signs of this gap: for example, the disciples do not succeed in healing an epileptic boy whom Jesus subsequently heals with the power of prayer (cf. Mk 9:14-29); and when children are brought to Jesus the disciples admonish them; Jesus on the contrary is indignant, has them stay and says that only those who are like them will enter the Kingdom of God (cf. Mk 10:13-16).

What does all this tell us? it reminds us that, the logic of God is always "different" from ours, just as God himself revealed through the mouth of Isaiah: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, / neither are your ways my ways" (Is 55:8). For this reason following the Lord always demands of human beings — of all of us — a profound conversion, a change in our manner of thinking and living, it demands that the heart be opened to listening, to let ourselves be illuminated and transformed from within.

A key point in which God and man differ is pride: in God there is no pride, for he is wholly fullness and is wholly oriented to loving and giving life instead in we human beings pride is deeply rooted and requires constant vigilance and purification. We, who are small, aspire to appear great, to be among the first, whereas God who is truly great is not afraid of humbling himself and putting himself last. And

the Virgin Mary is perfectly "in tune" with God: let us call upon her with trust, so that she may teach us to follow Jesus faithfully on the path of love and humility.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Are there things that you are afraid to ask God, that are off limits in your prayer because of what the answer might be when the Holy Spirit opens your heart?
- From your experience - what is essential in the act of welcoming?
- There is no pride in God - but there is in each of us. What are the prideful things in your life that you need God's help to transform?

## PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.