

**Homily for the National Catholic Development Conference
Nashville, Tennessee**

**The Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B
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Reverend Fathers and Deacons, consecrated men and women, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as your Episcopal Advisor I am happy to be among you and to celebrate this Eucharist for this annual meeting of the National Catholic Development Conference. On behalf of my brother Bishops and in my own name, I extend my heartfelt gratitude for the great work you do on behalf of the Church. Through your efforts to generate the necessary financial resources for the works of the Church, the timeless mission of our Lord is carried on, the Gospel continues to be heard and a culture of life is increasingly formed.

It has been said that one of the many reasons why God felt compelled to create Eve was because men would never find their way unless they had someone who was prepared to stop and ask for directions.

The stereotype, perhaps unfair, is that men are too proud when driving to admit they are lost and stop to seek help. No one likes to look

incompetent or stupid in front of anyone, let alone a colleague or a partner. It seems that many men would rather drive extra miles needlessly than admit that they do not know the way.

Is this a male characteristic or simply a trait of our common humanity? Think back to your own days as a student when you didn't dare ask the teacher for further explanation, for fear that you would be thought less intelligent than the rest of the class, only to breathe a huge sigh of relief when someone was brave enough to ask the question everyone else really wanted to ask. If we don't ask, how are we ever to learn?

Today's Gospel gives us hope that we are not the only ones who get it wrong and misunderstand the Good News of Jesus. In this account, the inability of the disciples, because of fear, to ask the Lord for an explanation of his instruction on his own impending death means that they have not yet grasped the real essence of what it is to be a follower of Christ.

Have you ever wondered what it was like for the Twelve Apostles to hear Jesus tell them a second time, "The Son is to be handed over to men and they will kill him" (Mark 9:31)? He is less specific and less detailed today on the road to Capernaum than he was last week on the way to

Caesarea Philippi. Last week Saint Peter rebuked him; today “they were afraid to question him” (Mark 9:32).

Commenting on their lack of understanding, Saint John Chrysostom says:

It is remarkable how, when Peter had been rebuked, and Moses and Elijah had discoursed, and had seen the glory of what was coming, and the Father had uttered a word from above, and so many miracles had been done, and the resurrection was right at the door (for he said, he should by no means abide any long time in death, but should be raised the third day), even after all that, they did not fathom what was happening. Rather they were troubled, and not merely troubled, but exceedingly mournful. Now this arose from their being ignorant as yet of the force of his sayings.¹

They could not understand how anyone would want to harm a man as just as Jesus, one whose words rang true and with authority, and whose actions were filled with righteousness. How is it that one who lived in right relationship with both God and men would be handed over and killed?

We, too, often share in their confusion because we forget the words of the wicked that we heard in today’s first reading from the Book of

Wisdom: “Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself up against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law and charges us with violations of our training” (Wisdom 2:12).

The wicked find the just one obnoxious simply by the virtue of his very existence; even without verbalizing a word against them, the manner of his life speaks against them because good always shines a light on evil. Wickedness cannot tolerate the good and so always seek to eradicate the good wherever it is found. Those who are wicked always presume that everyone else is also wicked; they look for false motives in the actions of one who is good and in Jesus they could find none; this is why they felt so condemned by him and why they acted so strongly against him.

The reality of the situation, of course, was quite different. In his many encounters with sinners, he speaks personally with them, often taking them aside from the crowd. As one example among many, he does not condemn the Samaritan woman at the well, but gently and lovingly invites her to leave her sinful ways and turn toward the good. This is his way with sinners even today, and those who leave their sin love him while those who remain in their sin hate him and anyone associated with him.

Most people, however, live lives that are neither full of wickedness nor of evil; most of us live somewhere in between, striving – to a greater or lesser degree – while still straying from the goal to which we are called. This is the situation among the Apostles we see today.

We might expect the Twelve to have argued about what Jesus meant when he spoke of his death. Was he speaking metaphorically, or did he truly mean what he said? Were his words about his death certain, or were they only guesses?

Rather than arguing about such questions, the Apostles argued instead about “who was the greatest” among them (Mark 9:34). So embarrassed were they at this topic of conversation that when the Lord asked them what they were discussing, “they remained silent” (Mark 9:34).

Whereas Jesus used the word “argue,” Saint Mark used the word “discuss.” Whatever the tone of the words shared among the Apostles – whether they were spoken as a heated argument, a normal conversation, or the sort of humorous competitive jests men often share – the topic at hand clearly disturbed the Master and Teacher. So closely were the Apostles to imitate Jesus that they, too, were to be just in all their ways; in their desires to be great, they proved themselves small.

You and I, brothers and sisters, are also called to a life that is just, a life that is not marked by “jealousy and selfish ambition” (James 3:16). Rather, our lives are to be “without inconstancy or insincerity” (James 3:17); in effect, we are to be just.

In all of our work, perhaps more so in fundraising, there is always a temptation to compare ourselves to others, to ask which of us is the greatest and who is more successful at raising money. Those who work and labor for the Church are not immune to such temptations. Even as I thank you for the dedicated service you provide to the Church and to her institutions, I urge you, in the words of Saint Gregory of Nyssa:

Let vanity be unknown among you. Let simplicity and harmony and a guileless attitude weld the community together. Let each remind himself that he is not only subordinate to the brother at his side, but to all. If he knows this, he will truly be a disciple of Christ.²

If we live as true disciples of Christ, the Lord will hear our prayers and uphold our lives, and peace will be found in our homes (cf. Psalm 54:4, 6).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Saint John Chrysostom, *The Gospel of St. Matthew, Homily 58.1*. In *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament Vol. II: Mark*. Thomas C. Oden, et al, eds. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1998), 119.

² Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Christian Mode of Life, 8.1*. In *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament Vol. II: Mark*. Thomas C. Oden, et al, eds. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1998), 120.