

Last week in the Gospel Jesus told of his passion and how his followers, too, must be prepared to suffer and even to lose their life. Peter's reaction is typical of ours when real suffering comes. No, Lord! No! Jesus told Peter his thinking was all wrong, that he needed to stop thinking like a man and start thinking like God.

That incident was valuable because it underlines for us that we need to *radically* reverse our values, to change our way of thinking, when it comes to the wisdom of God.

Today Jesus again predicts his passion in a kind of rerun of last week. This time the apostles say nothing—a very wise decision. They didn't really understand and they were afraid to ask. That's a crucially important thing for them, and for us to know. God's revelation is totally other. It overturns our way of thinking. It turns our perspectives upside down.

When they reach the house Jesus asks "What were you arguing about?" They didn't answer. They said nothing. This silence of theirs is a special silence. It's the silence of shame, the silence of guilt. We have all experienced this silence.

It's the silence of a young child when dad asks "Did you hit your sister?" Of a teenager when mom asks "Did you smoke again after you promised you wouldn't?" Of a guilty shop assistant who is asked "Did I see you take money from the till? Did you steal?"

SILENCE...The silence which comes when we are stared at by truth.

This was such a moment for the disciples. "Did I hear you right? Were you grown men arguing about which one of you was the greatest?"

And it would not have been just the question: *What were you arguing about on the road?* that startled the apostles. It would have been the instant awareness that nothing is hidden from the Lord and that the very question itself was already a conviction of guilt.

This, indeed, is a very interesting and essential insight which we need to make our own and bring to mind when we are considering our last judgment. The mere presence of the Lord Jesus makes us immediately

aware of wrong. At that moment all the wrong in our lives will acquire its true character and accuse us. Our eyes will suddenly be wide open as though we are seeing ourselves through *His* eyes. No sin will then escape us. We will see it all.

It is the *presence* of God which does this. The saints tell us that any authentic experience of God is at the same time an experience of our sinfulness. Like ultra violet light that shows all the stains in our white clothing, or the horrible realization we are dressed too casually when we walk into a formal occasion.

In the presence of God we become CONSCIOUS; we wake up. All our fantasies evaporate, our pretenses disappear and we are left with nothing but – ourselves – standing in the truth of who we are.

For many this could be quite an embarrassing moment to say the least; for some a flash of anguish and profound remorse; for some an explosion of utter joy.

Immediately I wonder how it will be for me. Do you wonder how it will be for you? There is, of course, a way to find out. Do you know what it is? *Prayer*.

Prayer is like a mini-judgment. Every time we pray, at least every time we pray well, we enter into the presence of God. And every time we enter into the presence of God we become more and more conscious, more and more awake. Then we rub the sleep from our eyes, they begin to focus, and we begin to see what we will see when we are judged – but with one difference – we will still have time and grace to change things.

What I have learned in prayer is that sin is not just doing bad things; sin is also refusing to become as good as God desires me to be. In other words, sin is living my life for *me* instead of for God. I suddenly recall the words heard by Fr. Steve Scheier when he was being judged by Jesus: *He has been a priest for twelve years for himself and not for me*. Living his comfortable life for himself, and not for Jesus was an indictable offense and it was judged harshly in this near death experience with the sentence of hell.

So that is why we pray. By continually placing ourselves in God's presence we learn *who* we are and *how* we are in His sight.

The apostles were arguing about who was the greatest. How silly they must have felt when the eyes of the Master turned on them: Instant awkwardness.

So Jesus sat down, called the Twelve to him and began to teach them the true meaning of greatness. You see? This is the beauty of prayer. What we learn there is never fatal – it is always redeemable – with the grace of our merciful Lord.

In prayer He will sit with us and teach us, over and over again, until the lesson sinks in. Then we become the little children he loves so much, and we avoid any possibility of embarrassment when he comes for us that last time.

- Fr. David M. Chiantella