

Jesus, Prophet and Servant

If you'd been on the Titanic and at the first signs of something being wrong had shouted for the life boats to get everyone off, you'd probably have been branded a scaremonger, but in reality you would have been a **prophet**. The writer of the *Book of Wisdom* from which we read this Sunday, is a prophet - his words of the virtuous man being a threat to those who would live a self centred life, because they see his joy and cannot fathom it, point us to Jesus, the greatest Servant of the Father. Jesus became a threat to all who would want to live a life solely centred on the self, because, for all their efforts, true happiness eludes them, while those whose love is expressed in humble service find true joy. The Kingdom of heaven is the home of those who, renouncing something of the self, live for others.

The Gospel of Jesus teaches us an odd truth, that contrary to what it seems, the greatest joy in life doesn't come about from being centred on yourself but in serving and bringing joy to **others** with a childlike, humble heart. **It's a hard truth to learn but once learned it changes the way you see life's purpose.** That's a prophetic message!

Prophets are those who listen to God and listen to the truths of life and then speak out. Prophets are not necessarily holier than others, and frequently they are people who have been wounded by life, but, like Jeremiah or Isaiah, they put their woundedness at the service of God. The sin or frailty I acknowledge in my life can become an opening for me to receive the grace of forgiveness, and so put my woundedness at the service of the Gospel.

The writer of the Book of Wisdom is a prophet who looks forward to Jesus, **the** virtuous man whose enemies would lie in wait for him, mock him that he has God for his help, torture him with cruelty and eventually do away with him, condemning him to the shameful death of the cross.

Jesus the Prophet this Sunday predicts his own death, not in a fortune-telling way but in reflective mood, knowing that his words and actions would cause such outrage among the powerful whose way of life Jesus opposed - by living himself in gentleness and truth - that they would have to do away with him. It is the disciples who are reluctant to accept all this - they wanted him to be the Messiah, but were scandalised by the thought of martyrdom: they wanted *gain without pain*, and the cross of Jesus stands over and against that. I remember the motto of the old St Saviour's High School in Dundee - *per Crucem ad gloriam* - through the Cross to Glory.



The depth of the lack of understanding of the apostles is revealed in their **quarrelling** - about who is the greatest. Jesus, of course is the greatest, but paradoxically, his greatness will be revealed in his **supreme act of humility**, going prophetically to the cross *like the lamb being led to the slaughter*.

The disciples on the other hand, are more concerned about greatness in the eyes of the world, success, and the quest for a happiness which eludes you, and eventually you find true happiness in the embrace of the cross and the kingdom. Still trapped by worldly concerns, those disciples illustrate the statement in the letter of St. James that we read today - *Why you don't have what you want is because you don't pray for it, and when you do pray and don't get it, it is because you have not prayed properly.*

Position in the kingdom of God, in his world, is based on service and humility, not on power and honour. For St Mark, the **Cross** occupies the central place in the gospel - you can't truly know Jesus apart from the cross. Fortunately, he consistently forgives our obstinacy and ability to hear only what we want to hear. Patiently, he continues to instruct us in the childlike way of life and welcomes us even in our sin and weakness. In doing so, he holds out the cross to us to embrace and to courageously join him in carrying it.