

# Proper 20 (September 18-24)

*Christian leaders are humble servants*

Last week the disciples were humbled by their inability to drive out a demon by their power. This week Jesus addresses their pride again and holds up a child as an example to them. Leadership is not conforming others to your will but being conformed to the will of Christ and serving those you lead. Followers of Christ, even leaders among them, are humble servants. Miriam and Aaron were taught that lesson in our First Reading. Moses demonstrates it. James applies it with instructions on how to live according to the wisdom of God (Second Reading). The worship planner will want to look ahead to next week to avoid overlap. Proper 21 focuses on jealousy over ministry between those who are serving. This week the relationship focuses more on the relationship between the leader and those they are serving. The follower of Christ serves in humility.

## Followers of Christ

Proper 19: Followers of Christ are armed for battle

**Proper 20: Followers of Christ are humble servants**

Proper 21: Followers of Christ celebrate the service of others

Proper 22: Followers of Christ love their family

Proper 23: Followers of Christ maintain proper priorities

Proper 24: Followers of Christ imitate Christ's selfless service

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<b>Gospel</b>	Mark 9:30-37
<b>First Reading</b>	Numbers 12:1-15
<b>Second Reading</b>	James 3:13-18
<b>Psalm</b>	115
<b>Gospel Accl</b>	Mark 9:35
<b>Color</b>	Green

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## Prayer of the Day

Mercifully grant, O God, that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts, for without your help we are unable to please you; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

## Gospel: Mark 9:30-37

Fresh down from the mountain of Transfiguration where Jesus had brought "the three" to see something they were told not to talk about, just a chapter removed from Peter being called "the Rock," it's understandable the disciples would have been talking about who was the greatest. But the teaching Jesus shares in our Gospel seems like an odd segue into that discussion.

Mark tells us that Jesus was teaching them about his betrayal (not mentioned in 8:31-32), death and resurrection. But they didn't get it. With typical adult pride they wouldn't ask for fear of embarrassment. They knew he had been talking about it, but it just didn't make sense yet. So, they talked about something else: who would be the greatest.

They didn't bring up the topic to Jesus, so he pressed them: "What were you discussing?" Their silence makes sense. They knew the attitude they had displayed was not an imitation of their master. But Jesus knew, so he calls them together and gives his wisdom: "If someone wishes to be first, he will be of all last and of all a servant." The first ones are the ones who willingly serve the will of another, who willingly do for another instead of themselves.

Then he uses the child to demonstrate his point. A child is someone who can't do anything for you, but you do many things for them. Jesus' illustration is brilliant in its simplicity. When we are putting ourselves last and serving one who needs serving, who could never repay us, we are living Christ-like lives. We are serving God. In Christ we find that true greatness is found in true humility.

### **First Reading: Numbers 12:1-15**

In our Gospel, the disciples argue and have to learn a lesson about humility from Jesus. In the First Reading, Israel's leading family has to do the same. The high priest Aaron and prophetess Miriam grumble against the humblest man on earth. They use his Cushite wife as the pretext. Their condescending view of another race shows their puffed-up spirit. Their positions of importance made them feel right in looking down on others.

God answers. If God privileges someone with leadership, that does not give them right to put themselves above others. God stands up for his prophet, appearing in the pillar of cloud and striking Moses' sister with leprosy. He said that they should have respected Moses' relationship with the LORD. Moses, then, gives us a wonderful example of humble leadership. He didn't tell his siblings they had it coming, but willingly interceding for them. Humble leadership is understanding that power actually lies in God alone.

### **Second Reading: James 3:13-18**

How should we measure greatness in Jesus' kingdom? Should we adopt the criteria that the world uses? In the eyes of the world, a person is great when he elevates himself above those who are around him, and that rarely happens in a spirit of humility and gentleness. Instead, those who want to be great in the world's eyes pursue their own selfish ambitions regardless of the effect their actions have on those around them. Worldly prominence and the desire to pursue it flow from envy and pride. In the end, such a selfish pursuit of one's own importance ends in disorder and every evil practice. The world may believe that pursuing greatness is wise. But the Holy Spirit inspired James to declare it is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.

True greatness in Jesus' kingdom is the exact opposite of worldly greatness. Those who are first in Jesus' kingdom show their greatness by acting toward others in ways that are gentle. This is true wisdom that comes from above. It is pure and innocent. It is peace-loving. It is considerate and willing to yield to the needs and interests of others. It is submissive rather than assertive. It is full of mercy rather than vengeance. It is evident in the abundant good fruit that is produced in the life of the person who possesses it. It is impartial and avoids showing favoritism. It is sincere.

In other words, the wisdom that comes from above seeks greatness as Jesus did, through humble service toward others rather than the selfish domination of others. When God's people sow peace in this way, they will reap a harvest of righteousness and will be great in Jesus' kingdom.

### **Psalm 115**

The Church sings Psalm 115 in services that emphasize our humility in view of God's grace. It was traditionally sung after the Passover meal. Martin Luther said, "Psalm 115 is psalm of thanks. It praises God for being the true helping God, with all other gods identified as vain idols which cannot help us. We are taught not to look at how religious and respectable we are, but instead we look to the glory of God and to his name for our salvation."

### **Gospel Acclamation: Mark 9:35**

Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.

### **Hymn of the Day**

767 - Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us