

XXV SUNDAY: Wis. 2:12, 17-20; James 3:16--4:3; Mark 9:30-37: Sept.20th 09.

At the screening of the film Mother Teresa during the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations in 1983, the Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar rose from his seat to introduce Mother Teresa with one sentence: "I present to you the most powerful woman in the world!" (Hers was the power of humble, sacrificial, Christian service and agape love!). On March 3, 1976, conferring on Mother Teresa the highest honor of India's Vishwa Bharati University, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who was at that time prime minister of India, said: "I feel myself dwarfed when I stand before this holy and mighty woman who heroically showed the world how to practice Christian love in sacrificial and humble service." She was the living proof of Jesus' words in today's gospel that real greatness lies in serving others. From 1962 onwards, she received national and international awards in recognition of her greatness, attained through the humble service done to the "poorest of the poor." On Sept. 5, 1997, the day of the death of this living saint, Pope John Paul II said: "Mother Teresa marked the history of our century with courage. She served all human beings by promoting their dignity and respect, making them feel the tenderness of God."

Mark presents Jesus as giving three predictions about his suffering and death, one each in chapters, 8, 9 and 10. The response by Jesus' disciples was horror and disappointment because they had been dreaming of a political messiah who would rule the earthly kingdom. Hence in chapter 8, Peter rebukes Jesus for his words. In chapter 9, (the first part of today's text), an argument arises among the disciples as to who among them is the greatest. And in chapter 10, James and John foolishly ask Jesus to give them seats on his right and left, when he comes to power. The second part of today's gospel describes what true greatness is.

The Christian criterion of greatness: Jesus says that people who serve humbly are the greatest. Presenting a child before them, Jesus explains that one who wishes to be the first among them must be a servant to all. True greatness consists in serving one's fellow men and is never self-centered. The two conditions of true greatness are humility and service. This vocation to service belongs to the Church as a whole and to every member of the Church. In other words, the Christian vocation is an apostolate of bearing witness to Christ through service. Christian history teaches us that whenever the members of Christ's Church have forgotten or ignored this call to service, the Church has suffered.

During this holy Mass let us pray for the true spirit of service, for an attitude of love for those around us. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us to become truly great through humble and selfless service. Mother Teresa puts it like this: "Be the living expression of God's kindness through humble service. The Missionaries of Charity, the order of nuns founded by Mother Teresa, live by this motto: "The fruit of Silence is Prayer. The fruit of Prayer is Faith. The fruit of Faith is Love. The fruit of Love is Service. And the fruit of Service is Peace."