

Twenty-Fifth Sunday of the Year

(Cycle B)

READING I: Wisdom 2:12,17-20 **DATE:** 09/19-20/2009
READING II: James 3:16-4:3* **PLACE:** Corpus Christi
GOSPEL: Mark 9:30-37 **TIME:** 4:00 p.m.; 10:30 a.m.
EVENT: Catechetical Sunday

THEME: At the heart of our polemics is selfishness. If we want to cultivate peace, then we must first cultivate a relationship with God in order to cultivate relationships with others.

I. Civility Takes a Blow

- Civility took a few on the chin this week.
 - Serena Williams stunned the tennis world when she berated and threatened a lines judge for what she felt was a bad call.
 - Kanye West left Taylor Swift speechless when he grabbed the mike from her after she won a music award and announced that Beyonce should have won the award instead.
 - And Congressman Joe Wilson was rebuked by the House of Representatives after he called President Obama a liar at last week's joint session of Congress.
- What is happening to civility in our society?

II. Self-Centeredness and Passion in Society

- Now, most of us, when we hear the word *civility* think of being courteous or polite.
 - And while civility certainly includes that, it's much more.
 - *Civility* comes from the Latin word *civilis*, which refers to something related to citizenship or public life.
 - At its root, then, civility is something that allows us to relate to one another in society; it holds us together in community.
- To be *uncivil*, then, means *not* being related to society or civic life, essentially seeing only oneself.
 - It goes beyond the simple failure to show courtesy to one another and instead includes downright anti-social behavior.
 - We see it anywhere from the cat fights and name calling on TV shows like Jerry Springer to the insults and abusive behavior surrounding our national debate over health care.

- At the heart of all this incivility is a fundamental self-centeredness – an attitude that says that I’m the only one who really matters.
- I don’t have to observe social conventions if they hamper my right to express myself freely.
- I don’t have to follow the rules of the road if they hinder my ability to get where I need to go or to accomplish what I need to accomplish.
- And I certainly don’t have to restrain my conduct in political life, because I have a right to get what I want and to keep what I have.
- In fact, in today’s social and political climate, it has become a badge of honor to behave in an uncivil manner.
- Shouting down your opponent is a sign of the *passion* you have for your viewpoint.
- Refusing to listen to another is a sign of the *conviction* you hold in knowing that you, and you alone, are right.
- These are the passions that are driving so many in our society today – the passions that are giving rise to the polemics that we’re witnessing.

III. Passion and Polemics in the Christian Community

- And this is exactly the kind of behavior that St. James condemns in his letter to the Christians of his day.
- Apparently, the early Christians were arguing among themselves.
- It’s not clear what they’re arguing about, but the disagreements seem pretty severe: “Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members?” St. James asks the Christians.
- It’s interesting to note that the Greek word that James uses for *war* is *pólemos*, the same Greek word from which we get our word *polemics*.
- And so the early are probably not engaged in armed conflicts in which they are killing each other.
- They are probably engaged in wars of polemics: passionate arguments among members of the community who hurling abusing words and actions at each other.
- And James attributes their behavior to their jealousy and selfish ambition.

IV. Cultivating Peace

- And he calls them out for their behavior.
 - Rather than praise them for their passion and conviction, he tells them that they must first seek the wisdom from above, which is pure, “then peaceable, gentle, compliant, and full of mercy and good fruits.”
 - “And the fruit of righteousness,” he tells them, “is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace.”
- For James, the wisdom from above comes from a relationship with God; and a relationship with God necessarily yields a relationship with others.
 - This has been his theme throughout his whole letter – from exhorting Christians not to be mere hearers of the Word, but to be doers of the Word, to encouraging us not to separate our faith from our works, but to demonstrate our faith by our works.
 - There is no point in a relationship with God if it does not lead to a relationship with others.
- So that, if we are to call ourselves Christians, then we must always be striving to live in community with one another, mindful of one another.
 - We have to be willing to give up our jealousies and selfish ambition in dealing with one another.
 - We have to examine our own beliefs and desires – no matter how passionately we feel about them, no matter how convinced we are that we’re right – and make sure that they include the welfare of others and not just ourselves.
- Only then can we cultivate and be at peace with one another.
 - Only then can we truly be civil to each other.

V. Conclusion

- As we celebrate Catechetical Sunday this weekend – celebrating the ministry of those who pass on our faith to others – let us be mindful of St. James’ message to us.
 - Passion and conviction are important in what we believe.
 - But once passion and conviction devolve into jealousy and selfish ambition, we have to question the content of our beliefs.
- A relationship with God necessarily calls us into a relationship with others.
 - A relationship with God calls us to believe passionately and to behave civilly.