

25B SML 2018  
MK 9:30-37

All of us pass through three stages of life: youth, middle age and maturity. Each of these three stages has a corresponding passion:

- ✓ The passion of youth is the body;
- ✓ The passion of middle age is power or ambition;
- ✓ The passion of maturity is wealth.

None of these passions are base in and of themselves. No passion ever is. They become base, however,

- ✓ in excess,
- ✓ and when consented to against right reason
- ✓ and the Law of God.

Those who live

- ✓ in excess, and
- ✓ consent against right reason,
- ✓ and the Law of God

in their youth usually live

- ✓ in excess, and
- ✓ consent against right reason,
- ✓ and the Law of God

when middle aged and when they mature. The object of their passion changes but they have not.

1. In youth, the object is the body, namely lust;
2. in middle age, the object is the ego or the proud mind, namely egotism;
3. and in maturity, the object is things outside the body and mind, namely greed.

Of the three: lust, egotism and greed, lust is the easiest to master, because the excesses of lust create its own emptiness. But egotism and greed are very difficult to cure, because they are inflationary sins. Excesses of the flesh deflate, but pride and wealth swell the ego to a point where we can come to believe we are truly great, either because we think we are great, or because we judge ourselves to be great by what we have, rather than by who we are.

This evening's (morning's) gospel addresses those sins that dominate in middle age, namely: egotism, pride and selfishness. One day when the Apostles were quarreling among themselves as to who was the greatest, Our Blessed Lord placed a child in the midst of them, as an example that the

littlest is the greatest (MK 9:35). He said, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all the servant of all."

In God's eyes, true greatness is indicated neither by great abilities nor by popular applause. Any talent a person has, such as a talent for singing, speaking or writing is a gift of God. He might develop his talent, but having the talent deserves no more merit than a child with a beautiful face. Rather, the richer the gift, the greater the responsibility to serve.

When Our Blessed Lord said that the first shall be the last of all and the servant of all, He made the measure of greatness not ability, but service, serving others. Serving others is good because it represses the ego.

Aristotle said that the two most degrading tendencies in a human being were towards bad temper and unregulated desire. Either one or the other is present in every egotist, as serving others is the last thing on his mind. He either gets mad at others because they do not praise him or do his will, or he seeks his own pleasure at the expense and shame of others.

Thomas A Kempis is a Catholic priest of the late medieval

period and he is the author of The Imitation of Christ, one of the most popular and best known Christian books on devotion, and read widely in seminaries. Regarding this very topic of egotism and greed, he wrote:

Anyone who places all his trust in people or in other created things is foolish. Do not be ashamed to serve others (today's gospel) for the love of Jesus Christ and to appear poor in the world. Do not rely on yourself, but place all your trust in God. Do what you can, and God will bless your good intentions. Do not trust in your own knowledge nor in anyone else's cleverness; rather, trust in the grace of God, who helps the humble and humbles the proud.

Do not take pride in your possessions, if you have any, nor in your friends because they are powerful and influential; instead, take pride in God, who gives all things and who wishes to give himself above all. Do not brag about the size or beauty of your body, which a little sickness can spoil and disfigure. Do not be pleased with yourself about your ability or talent, lest you displease God, from whom comes the sum of whatever natural good you have. Do not think that you are better than others, lest you appear worse in God's eyes; God knows what we are. Do not be proud of your good deeds, for God's judgement differ from ours, and he is often displeased by what pleases us. If you have any good qualities, believe that other people have better ones; by doing so you will retain your humility. It does you no harm if you place yourself beneath everyone else; it

does you great harm, though, if you place yourself about even one other person. A person who is humble is always at peace, but a proud person carries a heart filled with envy and resentment.

Our Blessed Lord centers his message around a child. So to rid yourself of egotism, pride and selfishness, think like the parent of a child.

If you are a father, do you not like to receive a tiny little gift, such as a candy cigar from your son? Why do you value it more than a box of Corona Coronas from a friend?

If you are a mother, does not your heart find greater joy in a handful of yellow dandelions from your little daughter rather than a dozen roses from a friend?

Do these trivialities make you richer? Do you need them? Would you be less without them? Yet you love them. Why? Because your child is acknowledging your love, your goodness and by doing so they are perfecting themselves, developing along lines of being:

- ✓ Service oriented rather than egotistical;
- ✓ Modest rather than prideful;

✓ kind rather than selfish;

and in so doing, the child is happy.

Whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me, but the One who sent me.