

**HANDING OURSELVES OVER TO CHRIST**  
**25th Sunday in OT, September 19, 2021**  
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Our Gospel today from St. Mark stands in stark contrast to our readings over the past several weeks. Gone are the crowds pushing in on Jesus hoping to catch sight of him. Gone are the throngs and mobs of people trying to hear his teachings. Gone are the multitudes of the sick and afflicted hoping to be cured. Today, we find Jesus and his band of twelve apostles walking alone as they journey through Galilee. Jesus is privately teaching his disciples... it's a time for intense formation. Jesus wants to be focused solely on those who will build his church... he is "teaching" and "telling" ... meaning this was not a single lesson but ongoing development of the twelve.

Jesus makes his second of three formal announcements about his passion (first – 8:31, third – 10:32-34) telling the apostles that he will be handed over, be killed and will rise... the three foundational elements of the Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection.

This “handed-over” element is an interesting one. Judas handed Jesus over to the temple guards who handed him over to High Priest of the Sanhedrin. The High Priest handed him over to Pilot who handed him over to Herod. Herod handed him back to Pilot who handed Jesus over to the cross. Jesus was not some helpless victim following forces out of his control... no... Jesus handed himself over in loving obedience to the will of his father. And, that father, he so loved the world that he handed over his only son for the forgiveness of our sins. The *human* handing over of the Christ is born out of envy, jealousy, betrayal and the hardness of heart that St. James highlights for us in our second reading. But *God’s* handing over of his only son is born out of love.

And how to the disciples react? Well, they don’t... they seem to lack any understanding and St. Mark tells us they are afraid to even ask... perhaps it was one of those situations where we say, “Don’t ask... you might not like the answer.” Perhaps the twelve, who had assumptions of Jesus vanquishing Rome and taking over Jerusalem, could not wrap their brains around the fact that their rabbi would be

put to death? Perhaps they feared for their own lives... if the teacher is to be killed then maybe his students will meet the same fate?

The band of men continue walk and their conversation turns towards who amongst them is the greatest, who is the best, who is number one. As they reach Capernaum and enter the house of Peter and Andrew, Jesus calls them out asking, “What were you talking about on the way?” Like children caught doing something wrong, the disciples fall silent out of embarrassment. Just after Jesus shares his handing-over, torture and death, the apostles’ conversation about who’s the biggest and the best is at the very least, inappropriate... it is contrary to everything that Jesus is trying to explain to them. The master takes advantage of this teaching opportunity by telling the men, “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and servant to all.” This is not to be some pious thought... it must be followed on each and every occasion with concrete actions. This was radical stuff that the disciples were hearing... humility and meekness were signs of

weakness. No one in their right mind would aspire to be last *or* to be a servant!

To drive home his point, Jesus picks up a child, a gesture not lost on his listeners as “child” in Aramaic and in Greek can also mean “servant.” Children, in the ancient world, are nonpersons with no rights and certainly no public status... they are simply things of little value. Yet Jesus raises the child to greatness by saying, “Whoever receives a child such as this in my name, receives me.”

As it was throughout Jesus’ ministry, the child represents the forgotten, the marginalized, the outcasts – the very people whom he associated with as the ones who needed him most. When we accept the homeless, the hungry, the addicted, the forgotten, the lonely and the poor... the nobodies of life... and minister to their needs without regard for self then we truly have learned the lesson that Jesus is trying to teach to his disciples... when are last, we are first.

Our Gospel contains two lessons that are intertwined... in putting ourselves last... in helping those in need... we receive Jesus and not only him, but the one who sent him. And, as we approach God's altar and Jesus which we find in the Eucharistic, we are handing over ourselves to the Messiah... to his grace, his goodness, love and his forgiveness.