

COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2006
(Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)
(Wis 2:12, 17-20; Ps 54; Jas 3:16-4:3; Mark 9:30-37)

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This Sunday's readings call us to reflect on the motives for our actions, and ask us to have singleness of heart and purpose. Our egos are so intrusive that they distort our attitudes and actions, so that these are not held and pursued out of a humble, listening, helpful heart, but are sullied by self-seeking, by our trying to get something for ourselves or to outshine others. There is a saying that the "squeaky wheel gets the oil," but ideally, the Christian should not be squeaking, but at peace, which, as St. Augustine said, is the tranquility of order.

Jesus' disciples, to an extent made apparent by the Gospel reading, were in it for themselves, they wanted to be greater than others. Jesus, the Servant of Isaiah, in Greek called the *pais*, meaning both servant and child (see Acts 3:13, 26), presents them with a little child as the model. Little children are humble, looking to others for their lead, asking questions and attentive, trusting with great innocence (which is why child abuse in any form is so unspeakably horrible). Children specially represent Jesus, the "son of God" of the first reading, tortured and reviled but humbly silent, letting God set things right in their due time (see the use of these words in Matt 27:39-43).

James is particularly incisive. The second reading follows a warning that few should strive to teach others, that in much speaking there is great danger (this is an ancient Near Eastern commonplace), that few can adequately control the tongue, which can start great fires. Our reading contrasts the unpeaceful disorder which results from jealous striving and rivalry with true wisdom, which does not impose itself except by its quiet, peaceful example. This is true righteousness, the opposite of war, due to uncontrolled passions and desire for material gain. The true Christian is content with little (see 1 Tim 6:3-10), and checks his ambition and desire to put others down; he lets God exalt him in due time.