

Weekly Gospel Readings

The 2nd Sunday of Epep

The Greatest in the Kingdom

On this blessed 2nd Sunday of Epep (07/16/2023), the Church reads from the Holy Gospel of St. [Matthew 18:1-9](#). In this passage, we see the disciples experiencing some human weakness. They were stung by jealousy when the Lord honored Peter more than all others in [Matthew 16:18](#), “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”, as well as for when he had been honored by being instructed to give the coin for Christ and for himself in [Matthew 17:27](#). So they approached Jesus and asked the Lord cleverly, " Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?". ([Matthew 18:1](#))

In those verses, the Lord is teaching the Disciples the sure way to greatness in the kingdom of heaven; which is through a childlike humility, dependence, lowliness, simplicity, obedience, and a willingness to love and be loved: “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” ([vv.3](#)). Obviously, this speaks not of literal children, but children in the sense described above, as well as it is mentioned in [Verse 4](#) “Whoever humbles himself like this child”, i.e., true believers ([vv.6](#)). As St. John Chrysostom elaborates on what it means to be a child: “Since both from envy the little child is pure, and from vainglory, and from longing for the first place; and he is possessed of the greatest of virtues, simplicity” (Homily 58 on Matthew).

After the discussion of being like children, Jesus gives a warning about being a stumbling block to others: “but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” ([vv.6](#)). St. Jerome explains how this discussion goes back to the original question the Apostles asked in [Matthew 18:1](#) “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” in his Commentary on Matthew: “Although this could be a general judgment against all who scandalize anyone, yet in the context it can likewise be understood to be directed to the apostles. For when they asked about who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, they seemed to be competing for honor between themselves. Had they persisted in this vice, through their own stumbling block they could have caused the ruin of those whom they were calling to faith, when these others see apostles fighting about honor among themselves.” Hence, the pride of the Disciples is the stumbling block Jesus was specifically referring to in this passage.

Finally, let today’s Gospel reading serves as a good reminder of how the desire for praise can act as a hindrance to any ministry. May we all strive to be as pure and humble as little children so the desire for praise does not affect the effectiveness of our service to others.

Resources

- [Matthew 18:1-9](#)
- [CHURCH FATHERS: Homily 58 on Matthew \(Chrysostom\) \(newadvent.org\)](#)
- [Commentary on Matthew - Jerome, St .pdf \(isidore.co\)](#)