

Homily on Mark ch 9 v 30-37. James ch 3 v 13- ch 4 v 3 22 September 2024.

Christian churches are not always model communities of good behaviour. They are rather places where human problems are brought out in the open, faced and dealt with. When Christian believers meet in churches, everything that can go wrong invariably does at some point. Outsiders then conclude that there is nothing to this religious business. Insiders see it differently. Just as a hospital collects sick people under one roof and labels them as such, the church collects sinners to be healed. The letter of James shows one of the church's pastors skilfully going about his work of confronting, diagnosing and dealing with many areas of misbelieve or mis conception in his congregation. I like the book of James because it is so practical and down to earth.. Deep and living wisdom is displayed here, wisdom both rare and essential. He is basically saying "What good is a truth if we don't know how to live it?" What good is an intention if we can't sustain it. It's the way you live, not the way you talk that counts. Wisdom isn't just head knowledge. real wisdom will show in our everyday lives. It is a bit like faith, an invisible inner quality. Wisdom is pure, it's peaceful, it is gentle and able to extend to others the kindly consideration we would wish to receive ourselves. Wisdom is a willingness to be conciliatory, it's full of mercy without partiality or hypocrisy.

According to church tradition James had the nickname "Old Camel knees" because of the thick calluses built up on his knobbly knees from many years of determined prayer. Prayer is always foundational to wisdom.

In Mark's gospel reading, the disciples clearly had more to learn about wisdom, they are arguing about who is the greatest implying that those who are not from their group count for little. They expected to have an exalted place in Jesus' kingdom based on their service to him on earth. Jesus tells them that it is ok to seek greatness BUT not the way that they are doing it focusing on raising their own status. They needed to lower themselves, to see and to serve others in need. Perhaps we can take heart from reading this, and later seeing how once Jesus had left them and they were given the Holy Spirit they totally changed. There are many other examples in the Gospels where Jesus says If anyone wants to be first he must be last and be a servant to all. Greatness comes from accepting the lowest social status in order to serve others. A child in those days was lowly and the least in the social order, but they, as small children are today, trusted unconditionally, they were pure, joyful and open to love and they gave love, Perhaps we complicate life too much, could we do with a more childlike simplicity in our outlook?