

## Who Is Number Last

**Intro.** The Israelites had been waiting many years for the Messiah to come. There were different ideas and hopes about what he would be. In the book of the prophet Isaiah, the image was of a servant, a servant who suffered much, which was to most people not the best idea of Messiah. The Israelites had been servants in Babylon and now under the Romans. The most appealing idea was of a heroic savior who would rescue the people and return the country to glory. This was the image the disciples believed in and found hard to give up.

**I.** As we read the gospel, it is too easy to think the disciples were not very smart. Why don't they get it! Why did the Lord choose them? If we focus on the disciples' on-going lack of understanding, we become as distracted as they were from the main

message of the Lord to them *and to us*. It is more helpful for us to focus on the explanation the Lord gave to disciples as a result of their refusal to face this new reality. Being his disciple means being a humble servant of others and finding the Lord and his Father in people who are considered “insignificant” or of no status in culture and society. [The Gospel of Mark, Donahue and Harrington, S.J., *Sacra Pagina*, Liturgical Press, 2002, p. 289] The example was a child. The disciples' slowness to understand the idea of a Messiah suffering, dying and rising from the dead, would not have been much different from our own if we were in their sandals. *We* have different ideas of what a good leader is. *We* – me included - don't want to hear what is uncomfortable or what is not part of *our* plan. *We* like to be in charge and don't like it when someone

suggests we aren't in charge of everything or even ourselves. What the Lord tried to tell his disciples is competition for position, money, power or authority does not lead to the Kingdom of God he is trying to build. The letter of St. James tells us where it leads instead: to jealousy, selfish ambition, wars and conflicts. It is where we are in the world today.

**Concl.** We live in a world that tilts more to these bad behaviors than the others James mentions: wisdom that is pure, peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity. Competition is not a bad thing if it doesn't trample over someone else to get to the goal. We seem to have to have lost a sense of the common good of all people, love of neighbor and trust in God, and we continue a pattern of selfishness. There is only one number One. But there are signs all is not

lost yet. On the news Thursday was a story of an eight-year-old Texas girl who, when she was four years old, heard about children in Africa who were refugees without school or even the simple toys of childhood. She didn't understand why. It is still a difficult answer. Now at eight years old, she decided to make a design for simple, cardboard desks and put together boxes of crayons, pencils, and paper. She plans to travel to Africa to deliver these basic supplies for children of her age. A six-year-old girl in Jacksonville selling her art to raise money for homeless children to have Halloween costumes. As the Lord demonstrated in the gospel, leadership is not about power or authority nor is it limited to adults. Sometimes we are led by a child.

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September 19,2021