



**Not  
the Kingdom of the King  
But  
the Rule of the Father**

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**45**

## Lenten Reflections

# Not the Kingdom of the King But the Rule of the Father

*“And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise’. And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him, and said to him, ‘Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.’ And he said to them, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ And they said to him, ‘Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.’ But Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you are asking..’ ...” Mark 10: 32 – 45.*

**The Lent is a time specially for self-critical reflections, repentance and renewal. A deep reflection on the verses from 32 to 45 (Mark Chapter 10) will reveal to us some essential elements of human nature. It will, definitely, inspire us to have an incisive inward look, and to have genuine repentance and renewal.**

**The verses Mark 10: 32-45 record one of the most painful incidents occurred during the public ministry of Jesus.**

### **Ahead of them**

Jesus and his followers were on the road to Jerusalem. Unshaken by the threats and unnerved by the things to happen in Jerusalem, **he walked ‘ahead of them’**. The disciples and the other followers were amazed at his courage, conviction, determination and haste, to confront the reigning religious and political powers and their ‘kingdom’, in his effort to usher in ‘the kingdom of God’. But ‘those who followed were afraid.’ Mark 10: 32.

## In preparation

To prepare them and to equip them further, Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man will be delivered..... and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise.” Mk. 10: 33,34. According to Mark, it was not the first time that Jesus shared with them about the things that were waiting for him at Jerusalem. **In fact, it was the third time.**

*Have we ever cared to take note of, in a serious way, the first response to this, from the disciples? And that too from two of the most prominent disciples?*

### The response of two of the closest disciples

If what is narrated in the next verses is a response from John and James, to their Master’s words about the certain death that awaited him in Jerusalem, it is, really, shocking; no, it is heart-rending! James and John “came forward to him and said to him, ‘Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.....’ And they said to him, ‘Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.’ Mk 10: 37. It is most saddening that these words came from none else than James and John!

**Who were they?** About John, it is said that the Master loved him most. It was to him that he, lying on the cross, entrusted his mother. In the previous chapter (Mark ch. 9) it is recorded that when Jesus went up the mountain, where he was transfigured, he took along with him only three disciples – Peter and James and John. Mark 9: 2-8. If Jesus chose only those three disciples on such a great occasion ‘to be with him’, those three must have been the most worthy of the disciples. Then, undoubtedly, James and John were two of the three most important disciples of Jesus.

*According to Mark, the two disciples placed the demand before the Master immediately after they were told that he would be killed in Jerusalem. It is most shocking! On hearing from the Master about his death, what they asked him was for seats on the right and the left! And nothing else! This response of the two of the closest disciples is unbelievable!*

### Hard questions

It would appear that it was the special consideration the two got from the Master during their days with him, and the special privilege granted to them for accompanying the Lord to be witnesses to his transfiguration, that emboldened the two, James and

John, to go 'forward to him' and ask for the seats on the right and on the left, when their Master would be seated in glory! **The seats on the Mount of Transfiguration drove them to ask for seats on the right and on the left!!**

*We need to reflect deeply on this. Do the special favours, positions and privileges that we get, only intensify our craving for more powers and higher positions? Or do these strengthen us to carry the cross to greater distances and to go up the hills? We need to ask ourselves these questions during this Lent.*

**They bear the 'cross' but their eyes are on the 'crown'**

A careful reading of these verses will reveal another very important aspect of the human nature. When the shocking request was put forward to Jesus by two of his most beloved disciples, he asked John and Jacob, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized." Mark 10: 38. Unhesitatingly, the two replied, "We are able". Mark 10: 39. The history testifies that both of them, through all the adversities and sufferings, tortures and persecutions, held on to the faith, and witnessed.

**It means that they 'drank the cup' their Master had drunk and were 'baptized' with the same baptism with which their Master had been baptized.** So the issue, in this case, was not the lack of personal commitment and unwillingness to lead sacrificial lives. **But, even while they were bearing the 'Cross', their eyes were on the 'Crown'.**

*That is one of the most unfortunate things, we see in the church and in the world of religions. Definitely, in a greater measure, in the society. The life of service is tainted by the craving for power!*

**What is the goal of our following the Master and Lord?**

There is a crucial question, a question of immense value. All of us must ask ourselves this question. What is the goal of our following the Master Jesus? The goal of our discipleship?

*What is the goal of our accepting him as our Lord? For 'crowns'? For 'thrones'? If not in this life, in the other, atleast?*

**Deep meditation needed**

They had been chosen "to be with him, to be sent out to preach...", Mark 3: 14,15. They were asking the Master, how they could be with him

‘when he would come in ‘glory’; **but strikingly, they were not asking him how they could be with him when he would be ‘scourged and killed’!**

*Isn't it something that should be deeply meditated upon?*

### **Essential human nature**

The demand to Jesus, of Jacob and John, has a special symbolic value. It was the request that arose from his two most beloved disciples! Despite our sincere following of his path, despite our love for our Lord, we may not be liberated from some human desires!

*‘The spirit is willing  
but the flesh is weak’!*

### **“You do not know”!**

Significantly, the first response of Jesus to the demand of his two prominent disciples was blunt and powerful. He told the two, “You do not know, what you are asking”! Mk 10: 38. That demand of theirs was revealing certain crucial aspects of their understanding. **Rather, their failure in understanding some vital aspects of Jesus’ teachings.** That is why Jesus bluntly said, “You do not know, what you are asking.”

*We should not fail to ask ourselves the question, “What was*

*it that the two of his closest disciples did not know? In what was it, that they revealed their ignorance?”*

### **Where else should they sit?**

When the two chief disciples put their request to their Master, with freedom, they must have thought that it was a natural, justifiable claim. And that there was nothing unfair about it. Because they were two of the closest disciples. Where else should they sit? **Even when the Master would come in glory they should be the closest!** Further, both of them were prepared to lay down their lives, ‘to be baptised’. So the two disciples must not have felt anything undue, unreasonable about their claim to the seats on the right and on the left.

*So their Master’s reply must have greatly surprised them!*

### **Terribly sad**

#### **– for another reason**

Jesus must have been terribly sad. Not only because his disciples, that too, two of the closest, asked for seats on the right and on the left, that is, for power. Of course, this aspect of their demand would have saddened him.

*But he was sad more because of another reason.*

## They failed to know and accept the Central Message

Through their demand, shockingly, the two disciples revealed their misunderstanding, or absolute lack of understanding, about the most important message, the central message, of their Master. Jesus had come to usher in the 'kingdom of God'. *"Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.'*" Mk 1: 14 &15. Jesus came to establish the kingdom of God, totally replacing the reign of Caesar. Or as some Biblical scholars say the 'empire' of God in place of the empire of Rome, the reign of God ending the reign of Rome. The central message of Jesus was that the rule of God would be established in place of the rule of Caesar. And Jesus, **very clearly, unequivocally**, taught them to pray, **"Our Father who art in heaven, ..... Thy kingdom come....."** Matt. 6: 9, 10. So Jesus came to establish God's kingdom, the reign of God. Also he taught them to set, the coming of the kingdom of God, as their ultimate goal. And to pray, **"Our Father,....,**

**Thy kingdom come..."** Matthew 6: 9 &10. He chose them, took them around, taught them and sent them out two by two, to pray for, work for, totally dedicate themselves for, completely lose themselves for, and even lay down their lives for the establishment of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of the FATHER. Not the kingdom of the king! Yes, the Kingdom of the FATHER. In the 'Kingdom of the Father', there is no king! The nature of relationships and the rules of governance are totally different. There is no throne! In the kingdom of the Father, the relationship between the head and the others is filial. It is the relationship between the Father and His children. In the kingdom of the King, the relationship is between the unquestionable ruler and the subjects, and is of inviolable orders and implicit obedience.

*The Kingdom of the Father and the kingdom of the king have nothing in common. In fact, they are antithetical! The Kingdom of the Father is the Kingdom without a king!!*

### **Sadly, in worldly terms**

Very, very sadly, even at the end of his public ministry, two of his most

beloved disciples, two who had the rarest of the rare experiences on the Mount of Transfiguration, thought of the kingdom that their 'Teacher' was striving to establish, in purely worldly terms! That must have terribly saddened Jesus. It must have broken his heart. It must have been more saddening to the Master than the rejection of him by the scribes and the priests! Than the unconcern by the gentiles and the impending death in Jerusalem!

*How do we understand the Kingdom /Reign of God that our Lord came to inaugurate? Is it in worldly terms-with crowns, thrones, staff, order, conquests, annexations, wealth....? Do we truly believe that the 'Kingdom' of the Father can, in no way, be understood in the terms of 'kingdom of the king' or 'empire' of the emperor? Our precise understanding of the empire/ kingdom/reign of God is, truly, the authentic criterion whether we follow 'the Way' of the Saviour from Nazareth.*

### **Not 'bullets' but 'brooms'**

No doubt, they were called to reject the rule of the king, the emperor, and to submit themselves to, to embrace, the rule of the FATHER. He

taught them to understand that the 'WAY' or Governance of the Father was absolutely different, antithetical to the 'way' of governance of the king or the emperor. Undoubtedly, the nature and pattern of the rule of the Father based on love, would be totally different from the rule of the king or the emperor using 'sword'. The 'tool' of governance, in the 'kingdom' of the Father would be not 'bullets' but 'brooms'. They were called to be 'servants' **and not to seek 'seats'!**

*Do we genuinely, sincerely, believe in, look forward to, and toil for a kingdom where the Master is the Servant and where the Master is one who burns himself for other? The Kingdom where the law of governance is based on love?*

### **Still, in worldly terms?**

Jesus was terribly pained that his long association and interaction with the two disciples did not enable them to have a different vision about the rule of God, the Father.

*Even when his ministry on the earth was about to come to an end, the disciples conceptualized the rule of the Father in terms of, in the fashion of, the rulers of the earth!*

*During this time, when we painfully meditate on the suffering and sacrifice of our Master and Lord, we need to dwell deeply on this incident narrated by Mark. Let us pray that we would be guided by the Holy Spirit to re-discover that the 'Kingdom', the 'Reign', for the establishment of which our Lord laid down his life, was the Kingdom/the Rule of the FATHER. In our actual life, we are authorized, in no way, to 'rule', to 'govern' the worlds that we are assigned, as the kings do - families or public spaces, organizations or institutions, social structures or political establishments, congregations or constituencies, churches or countries, small or large. This profound re-discovery would amazingly change our lives, and surely the lives and the situations that we are responsible for, too. Our faith in, and hope for, the establishment of the Rule of the Father, based on Love, will radically change our lives, our words and actions and our witness in the World.*

*We have no King; we have only the FATHER.*

*We have no subjects; we have only brothers and sisters, whatever their caste, country, colour or creed.*

– Mammen Varkey



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## **A Vichara Publication**

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