

On reading today's first reading I was reminded of the poisoning of the Russian activist who just escaped death. He was attacked because he spoke up against corruption. The Russian authorities could have had the words in the first reading on their mouths "*he annoys us and opposes our way of life. Let us see what kind of end he himself will have.*" It's often the tactic to try to discredit an opponent by trying to find some dirt on them. This was the reaction when the authorities were found out.

When Jesus preached the gospel his opponents too tried to discredit him. He eats with sinners and tax-collectors; what sort of upright person would do such a thing?

We see in the gospel today that Jesus is in the midst of teaching the disciples about his forthcoming death. Jesus realises that the disciples are not listening to what he is really saying, but rather have fallen into the very same ways as the scribes and Pharisees, and are arguing about who's going to get the best places. Who is the greatest?

Jesus has to sit them down and start teaching them again, not in preparation for his coming death and resurrection, which was the most difficult message to deliver, but rather about their ideas about social standing and the values of the kingdom.

Taking a little child as an example Jesus involves one who has no power, no status, no authority, one who is totally dependent on others, The acceptance of the least is not just what disciples must do, but it is what God does first of all. God sees beyond. Nothing short of total acceptance.

Recognising our common humanity and our equalness is the beginning of a journey. Carl Rogers, a well known therapist, said that is why we recognise our shared humanity, there is no experience that I cannot share with another, no suffering I cannot care about, no fear that I cannot understand, because I too am human, I too am vulnerable.

The mask of uprightness that hid the scribes and pharisees was not to happen to the disciples of the new way—the values of the kingdom must give us the confidence to be ourselves before God, there is no need to pretend otherwise. When we have done this, questions about who's first and who's last, who's got the best seats in the kingdom become not only irrelevant but are totally contrary to Jesus' example.

We have to welcome our common humanity wherever we find it, and having embraced it do all we can to serve it and liberate it by our own lives of service.