

25th Sunday (b)

The first thing that struck me about today's gospel is the stark contrast between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus was trying to prepare them for the sufferings he would endure, and they were preoccupied with which of them was the greatest. They just did not understand what Jesus was trying to tell them, and St. Mark tells us, "They were afraid to ask."

Jesus seems to have had a lot of big egos in his group. Not a real good attitude for discipleship, so he had to have a little talk with them. It is easy to imagine that as Jesus is talking with them, there were a few children close by. Jesus motioned to one child, to come to him and, putting his arms around the child, Jesus demonstrated the kind of attitude he expected of his followers. In that society children were greatly loved, but they had no social status. They depended totally on the goodwill of their elders. If his disciples were to learn from Jesus and imitate him, they could not be worried about who would be most important in the kingdom; they would have to become more like Jesus in their thinking. Jesus' attitude was that of service. "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all." Jesus says of himself that He came "not to be served but to serve".

Now, Jesus is not asking us to become doormats for everyone to walk on, or to adopt the attitude that we are NOT worth anything, and have no importance. When Jesus said we should love our neighbor as ourselves, He implies that we should love ourselves... Otherwise we won't be very good at loving anyone else. As a matter of fact, each of us is of infinite worth. Jesus shed His blood FOR US. That's how much he

loves and values US. If all we do is put ourselves down, that will not make us holy, it will only make us depressed. The Christian spirit is a spirit of Joy, not depression. We could say that what Jesus was trying to impress on his disciples was not that they think LESS of themselves, rather that they think of themselves LESS. This is an attitude that will help us be more sensitive to the needs of others.

Let's take a minute to ponder Jesus and his service to us. It begins, of course, with creation, with loving us and willing us into being. Then He, the infinite Son of God, took on our human nature in the womb of Mary. As Paul said, he emptied himself and took on the form of a slave. He spent his public ministry teaching, healing, casting out demons and accepting rejection and abuse for his work of service. He met with hostility from the powers that be and even a gruesome death, rather than abandon his work of service. And, His work of service continues to this day by his presence with us, especially his presence in the Eucharist as he gives US his body and his blood to be our food and source of eternal life.....

There was a man who died and went to heaven. He was amazed when he got there to find people he never expected to find. He commented to God, "Wow, I never expected to find some of these people here... and... by the way, Why is everyone so quiet?" God said, "Well, it's because they are all a bit shocked. They never expected to see you here."

Most of us will probably be greatly surprised when we get to heaven and see who is there and who enjoys a more exalted position. God doesn't see as we see.

Let us praise and thank God for all he has done for us. Let us pray that we might learn from his example of generous kindness and service to us, and extend it onto others..... rather than thinking of ourselves..... as being greater.