

Not to Be Served but to Serve

SUNDAY 17 OCTOBER 2021 GOSPEL READING: Mark 10:35-45

35 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." 36 And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" 39 And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." 41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. 42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 **and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.** 45 **For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve,** and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Meditation: Who doesn't want to be first, and to be esteemed and honoured by others? We seem to have an unquenchable thirst for recognition and fame, power and authority to rule our own lives as we please as well as the lives of others. Should we be surprised to see the disciples of Jesus thirsting for power, position, and authority? James and John, the sons of Zebedee, urged their mother to strike a deal with Jesus, their Master and Messiah. They wanted the distinction of being first and most important in position, next to Jesus, of course!

Jesus turns authority and power upside down

When Jesus called the twelve apostles to be his inner circle of disciples who would teach and exercise spiritual authority on his behalf, he did the unthinkable! Jesus taught contrary to the world's understanding of power, authority, and position, by reversing the order of master and servant, lord and subject, first and last! Jesus wedded authority with love, position with sacrifice, and service with humility. Authority without love is over-bearing and slavish. Position without respect and concern for the subordinate is demeaning and rude. And service without generosity and sacrifice is cheap and unkind.

Those who wish to serve with the Lord Jesus and to exercise authority in God's kingdom must be prepared to sacrifice - not just some of their time, money, and resources - but their whole lives and all that they possess! Jesus used stark language to explain what kind of sacrifice he had in mind. His disciples must drink his cup if they expect to reign with him in his kingdom. The cup he had in mind was a bitter one involving crucifixion. What kind of cup does the Lord have in mind for us? For some disciples such a cup entails physical suffering and the painful struggle of martyrdom. But for many, it entails the long routine of the Christian life, with all its daily sacrifices, disappointments, set-backs, struggles, and temptations.

Christ's way of love and service

A disciple of Jesus must be ready to lay down his or her life - each and every day in the little and big sacrifices required - and even to the point of shedding one's blood if necessary for the sake of Christ and his Gospel. What makes such sacrifice a joy rather than a burden? It is love - the kind of "love which God has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). An early church father summed up Jesus' teaching with the expression: "to serve is to reign with Christ." We share in God's reign by laying down our lives in humble service and love for one another, just as Jesus did for our sake. Are you ready to lay down your life and to serve others as Jesus has taught and modelled for us?

Psalm 126:1-6

- 1 When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.
- 2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."
- 3 The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.
- 4 Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb!
- 5 May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy!
- 6 He that goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

Daily Quote from the Early Church Fathers: *Not to be served but to serve*, by John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)

"[Jesus] says, 'The Son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.' It is as if he were saying, 'I willed not even to stop at death but even in death gave my life as a ransom. For whom? For enemies. For you. If you are abused, my life is given for you. It is for you. Me for you.' So you need not be too picky if you suffer the loss of your honour. No matter how much it is lowered, you will not be descending as far as your Lord descended. And yet the deep descent of one has become the ascent of all. His glory shines forth from these very depths. For before he was made man, he was known among the angels only. But after he was made man and was crucified, so far from lessening that glory, he acquired further glory besides, even that from his personal knowledge of the world."

"So fear not then, as though your honour were put down. Rather, be ready to abase yourself. For in this way your glory is exalted even more, and in this way it becomes greater. This is the door of the kingdom. Let us not then go the opposite way. Let us not war against ourselves. For if we desire to appear great, we shall not be great but even the most dishonoured of all. Do you see how everywhere Jesus encourages them by turning things upside down? He gives them what they desire but in ways they did not expect. (excerpt from *THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW, HOMILY 65.4.25*)

OPENING PRAYER Lord Jesus, make me a servant of love for your kingdom, that I may seek to serve rather than be served. In flame my heart with love that I may give generously and serve joyfully for your sake. **Amen.**

CLOSING PRAYER:- World and Covet19. Lord, Look upon the victims of Covet19 throughout the world with eyes of mercy, may your healing hands rest upon them, may your life-giving powers flow into every cell of their bodies and into the depths of their souls, cleansing, purifying, restoring them to wholeness and strength for service in your Kingdom. **Amen!**