

Commentary to the 29th Sunday Ordinary Time

Authority and Service.



Mission Sunday 2015

James and John had it all wrong. They wanted authority. They wanted to sit at the right hand and left hand of Jesus when the Kingdom of God was established on earth. They wanted to lord it over others. They wanted to be powerful and feared because of their power. They looked forward to being in authority.

They had it all wrong. In the Kingdom of God, authority would come through service, not through power, not from position or power or fear.

You parents, good parents as you are, know this. You want your children to respect you and, for their sakes, listen to you. You know that you earn that respect not through intimidation and fear, but by your sacrifice for them. Your way of life, your daily routine, revolves around caring for your children. Sometimes you have to remind your children about all that Mom and Dad does for them out of love, but all in all, your children respect you because they experience how much you show your love for them every day. That is the source of your authority.

This is what Jesus is telling James, John and the other disciples. True power, true authority, flows from service.

Jesus summoned them and said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

We are a Eucharistic people. You hear that expression all the time. But what does that really mean? We celebrate Jesus's Presence in the Blessed Sacrament. We receive communion. We adore his Presence in our tabernacles and during Eucharistic adoration services. But that is just one part of the Eucharistic dimension of our lives. To be a Eucharistic people, our celebration of the Eucharist must encompass washing the feet of the Lord's people. Remember that was what Jesus did before He gave His Body and Blood at the Last Supper. He washed the feet of his disciples and then issued the Mandatum, the mandate for them and for us: "What you have seen me do, you also must do." This was followed by the sacrament of the Lord's Body and Blood. We celebrate the Eucharist through service to others and continually experience the Presence of Christ.

Today's gospel is really an encouragement to continue to serve the Lord through serving others. It is an encouragement for our parents, particularly our Moms, whose days are spent in so many loving tasks and who often many levels are beyond tired. What you are doing is noble, and holy, and Christian. You are giving yourself in service to people whom God loves, and whom you also love, your children. How many of our Dads are also tired, and worn out by work and the stress of providing for their families? Yet, there they are coaching, leading scouts, helping with homework, and looking for new ways to engage their children. Parents must have authority over their children for the home to function properly. Your sacrifice is how you achieve this authority. It is the Christian way.

James and John had it all wrong. They wanted power, they wanted authority. Instead, Jesus called them to sacrifice and service. And when, after Pentecost, they sacrificed their lives for the sake of the Kingdom of God, they were, in fact, among the great gathered around Jesus' throne.

It's the same for us. We sacrifice for others and the sacrificial love of the Lord gives us the authority to call ourselves Christian.

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