

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Jul 25th 2015

My reflection on the reading from Matthew comes at a time when fifteen or so (I am sure between the time I wrote this and when you read it the number will have increased!) people are jockeying to be the Republican or Democratic nominee for U.S. President in the 2016 election. As one might expect, the media is full of opinions on these aspirants and their positions. So much time and effort spent in talking about who will be the best leader for our country. I wonder what Christ would say about all these potential “rulers” if He were walking among us today?

Some of my earliest memories are of parents and grandparents and extended family elders reminding us children not to be like James and John from today’s gospel. Oh, they didn’t use those apostles’ names specifically, but the sentiments were the same – don’t make a spectacle of yourself, don’t put yourself above others, remember your place, who do you think you are, be careful or someone will take you down a peg or two, and similar phrases. When I think back on it now, and setting aside the little ego stings in the moment that accompanied any such chastisement, I think they were trying to teach humility. They were trying to show me that while what you do may be somewhat remarkable, a proper disposition while doing those good deeds is also important.

I like Jesus’ way better than just sayings and critiques. Jesus says to the apostles – do the right thing and all else will be right. Serve, discern needs and meet them, act in solidarity with others, and don’t worry about how you will personally be perceived or what plaudits will come your way. Just do the right thing – do as Jesus would do and take up His chalice. Learning humility from Jesus is much simpler than a string of clichés – model your behavior on what He would do.

But it is hard work to do this! I suspect most of us have at one time or another been in a position of responsibility. And I suspect most of us have made mistakes while in that position – acting as if the position was ours by right, or not being sensitive to the needs of the people that reported to us, or being more enamored with what others thought of us than doing what we were appointed to do. We exalted ourselves instead of being humble. It is easy to believe in our own wonderfulness and forget why we really are in the position we find ourselves. In Jesus’ words, we might have “lorded it over” those for whom we held a position of trust and stewardship.

Although we can learn humility by studying the actions of great role models – Jesus, Mother Teresa, Albert Schweitzer, etc. – we still have to serve in order to learn real humility. We can’t be humble until we become one with God by letting go of the ego and allowing God to work through us as we serve God’s people in our daily lives. Knowing and doing are two different things entirely – one involves only the mind, while the other involves the heart.

I think one message Jesus sends here is for us to let go of the need to worry about the results in the future – instead, live in the now of serving the people who need your help. That is what Jesus did, and what Mother Teresa did. And that is what we must do. And perhaps there also is a subtler message here as well – leaders that we should emulate and esteem are authentic and worthy of adulation when they are servants first. Hmm, now how to get THAT message out in the current political arena??!

And so my prayer today is for the grace to serve others as I feel God calls me to them, and to let go of my ego so I can learn humility.

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