

## Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Oct 12th 2016

It was Christmas Day 1995. I was fresh out of the Jesuit novitiate, doing my graduate studies in education in Goa, India. I was looking forward to a sumptuous community lunch when my provincial, Fr. Gregory Naik, came to my room and said that the kitchen sink on the 4th floor of the Jesuit house had been blocked since a few days and the water had collected in the wash rooms on the floor below. He enquired if I would be willing to help him drain out the water and clean out the mess. (Heck, how do you say “No” to your provincial if you wish to continue in the Society of Jesus?!) As an obedient son of Ignatius, I followed him. He rolled up the sleeves of his shirt and got into stinky water that was about a foot deep and began to clean out the mess.

By his example, my provincial taught me that to lead is to serve, to let go of one’s ego, one’s academic degrees, or one’s status and do what has to be done. In today’s gospel from Luke, there is the same core understanding of leadership as service; Jesus leads by example. The Pharisees and scribes/lawyers, however, had failed to grasp this call to serve their sisters and brothers. Earlier in Luke’s gospel (Chs. 5 and 6), they found fault with Jesus’ disciples and Jesus defended his friends. Now they train their guns on him; instead of washing himself according to the laws of purity, he “enters and sits” when invited to the house of a Pharisee for a meal.

Jesus does not defend himself; rather, he chastises his opponents because their words and their actions do not match. They are opposed to God’s prophets and to God’s will. They are meticulous in external rituals (cleaning the outside of a cup) but they are filthy inside (greed and wickedness). They tithe (one-tenth of their income) tiny herbs from the kitchen garden but they are not concerned about justice. They desire their own glory (seek first places in the synagogues and wait to be greeted in the marketplaces). The blighters are ready to lay extra burdens (laws, rituals) on simple people, but are not ready to lift a finger to help them. They are hypocrites, living shallow lives, like unmarked/secret graves.

Jesus’ words challenge us to examine our own hearts and to transform our behavior. To avoid the temptation to dominate others and to self-glorification, let us pray with Ignatius:

Lord, teach me to be generous.

Teach me to serve you as you deserve;

to give and not to count the cost,

to fight and not to heed the wounds,

to toil and not to seek for rest,  
to labor and not to ask for reward,  
save that of knowing that I do your will.

Roland Coelho, S.J.-Creighton University's Graduate School