

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Feb 27th 2013

The Department of Motor Vehicles. A dreaded term as it means a long wait, arbitrary rules and lots of frustration. My teenage daughter is eager to get her Driving Learner's Permit which meant a visit to the Department of Motor Vehicles, the DMV. The office hours are limited so I needed to take some time off from work and make sure I hurried over to her school so we could get to the DMV to get in the queue before closing time. The number issued to us upon arrival indicated that we had an estimated 52 minute wait. My annoyance transformed to gratitude when I realized I could spend that time with today's reading and in prayer. Taking time for prayer and reflection is so important always but particularly during this Lenten season. I can honestly say I don't regularly give myself 52 minutes each day to pray. Who knew that sitting in the rows of plastic molded chairs in an overcrowded and overheated office would be a time and place for prayer?

Today's readings are filled with suspicion and attribution. In the Psalm we cry to the Lord, "I hear the whispers of the crowd that frighten me from every side, as they consult together against me, plotting to take my life." When I feel stressed, as I did today at the DMV office, it is easy to view others with suspicion. The crowd in the office becomes a metaphor for those enemies who stand in my way of following Jesus. But truth be told, it is my response to the detractors not the detractors themselves which gets in my way. I glance around the crowded DMV waiting room wondering who is going to disobey the rules and get to the counter before their turn and therefore before me. Who is looking at me thinking that I will not respect the time they have spent waiting? And what a contrast between waiting for 52 minutes for a driving permit and being willing to suffer persecution for one's devotion to the Lord. This revelation helps me put the stressors of daily life in perspective so I can focus on what is truly important.

In today's gospel the mother of James and John is a focused advocate for them to sit at the right and left hand of Jesus in the kingdom. Naturally this request causes a stir among the disciples. Jesus gently reminds the disciples and us that "whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave." Today at the DMV office I wished to be first and would have been willing to pass on the 52 minutes of prayerful wait time. Tapping into that desire helps me explore other times in my life I wish to be first and to wonder what is my motivation. Perhaps I strive to lead a committee or a group process. I can convince myself that my motivation is about service to the mission, but I wonder if I could support the mission by serving the group rather than leading the group. What are my attachments to pride, authority, power and how can I channel my energies and talent in the best service of the kingdom of God? Fortunately I need only humbly look to Jesus as a model as he reminds us: "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." What a gift and an inspiration.

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