

Sunday October 17th, 2021
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Parishioner Reflection
By: Paul Legace

In the readings and gospel this week the theme is about power and leadership. Many people today and in the past are drawn to individuals with charismatic personalities and leaders who are decisive and powerful. Christ presents to us a different form of leadership in the gospel this week. The type of leader Jesus embodies is more closely associated with a servant or slave. How can a leader be a servant let alone a slave? It doesn't mesh with our modern concepts of leadership. It didn't coincide with the disciples' understanding of a leader 2,000 years ago as well, but Jesus frequently upends our preconceived notions to shed light on a more just and humane form of leadership.

The first reading is taken from Isaiah (53.10-11). The prophet foretells about Jesus being the offspring of the Lord. Jesus will be a ransom for our sins. He will endure great pain in the form humiliation, torture and crucifixion. Jesus obeyed his Father, became in essence the obedient servant to fulfill his mission. By his words and actions he demonstrated how we should treat one another.

In the second reading St. Paul addresses the Hebrews (4.14-16). St. Paul compares Jesus to a Great High Priest who is infinitely more sympathetic to our condition here on earth. Jesus has taken human form and lived among us. He knows the temptations and challenges that come with living, yet he is without sin. God is merciful and loving, not a tyrant. St. Paul encourages the Hebrews to be bold and ask for God's grace in good times and in times of suffering. God will not forsake his children who ask for grace.

In today's Gospel James and John ask Jesus if they can sit at his left and right side in the afterlife. These two disciples wrongly believe that being disciples of Jesus merits them a special place in the kingdom. Jesus corrects them and explains that whoever wishes to be great among you must be servant of all. He came not to rule and be served but to serve. Jesus was to give his life as a ransom for many. What does Jesus mean by these words? Jesus is expressing his views about leadership and how his version of leadership is much different than what the disciples envision. Jesus came to serve not to rule like a tyrant and be served by others. This type of servant leadership is a radical version for the apostle and for us two thousand years later.

Servant leadership is open and very much aware of the needs of his or her followers. Jesus grew up in a Jewish society that ostracized those who had leprosy. Members who were blind, crippled or afflicted with other physical ailments were also shunned. Jesus looked upon them with love and healed countless numbers demonstrating that the Lord is merciful and abounding in love. Others such as tax collectors and prostitutes were also shown mercy and invited to be followers of Christ. Many changed their ways and became his close friends. Who in our modern society is living on the margins and given little respect? We need to really look about and see those who are poor, chronically unemployed and suffering from possible addictions or mental health issues. How can we serve them? Our Lady of Grace has an outreach program called Welcoming Arms that works with other Christian parishes in Aurora to help the poor along with the St. Vincent de Paul Society. One could donate money, clothing and or toiletry items or possibly volunteer some time to work with these worthy ministries within our community and region. Other ministries that serve the Catholic community as well as the greater community of Aurora are the Knight of Columbus and the Catholic Women's League. They are involved in food drives, summer camps and other worthwhile projects to assist many needy members of our community.

The pandemic has turned our world on its head and continues to create more pain and suffering. There are many elderly members who are isolated in seniors homes and long term care facilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed this tenuous environment and the low wages of personal support workers (PSWs) in these long term care facilities. Visiting a senior in these homes can bring much happiness and joy. Our Lady of Grace operates a Lay Pastoral Ministry that connects a senior with a parish volunteer. This is a great example of servant leadership at its core.

One must not overlook prayer and how it offers communication with Our Lord. Praying for those who are undergoing suffering and loss, whether it be a friend or relative who is ill, one who has died or another who is undergoing a separation or divorce. One's prayers can help serve to assist those in need to overcome the pain of loss and comfort them in the present and the days, weeks and months ahead. Servant leadership can take many forms and one only needs to look to Jesus to see how he demonstrates this time and again.

Who else in our society lives on the margins despite the overall high standard of living of Canadians? First Nations have for many years been neglected and their culture

systematically destroyed by decades of residential school involvement. Many homes on northern First Nation reserves are in a deplorable state and their drinking water is contaminated. How can we put pressure on our Members of Parliament to follow through with their promises to address the inadequate housing, social services and potable water problems that continually impact these Canadians? Educating oneself is a first step in understanding these chronic problems. Writing letters, sending emails and signing petitions is a second method of voicing your concern for these neglected Canadians.

Servant leadership was a radical concept for the disciples. Simply put Jesus came to serve others and not to be served. This is clearly demonstrated when Jesus washes the feet of the disciples as vividly told in John's Gospel (13.1-17) In the Jewish culture at the time of Jesus it was the slave that washed the feet of others, especially the master. Jesus takes on the role of the slave and this action shocks the disciples. Their concept of leadership is based on the cultural norms of their society. How can a leader act as a slave? This is exactly what Jesus is trying to teach them. They must be of service to each other and to the followers of Christ if they truly want to lead. Pope Francis emulated Christ's actions when he washed the feet of twelve juvenile prisoners on Holy Thursday, March 28, 2013. How will we present Jesus to others in need in our community today and in the future?