

Sunday September 19th, 2021

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Parishioner Reflection

By: Edel Reid

In his Divine Wisdom, Jesus knew full well the kind of men he had chosen as His disciples, with all their faults. When we think of the disciples now, we focus primarily on the tremendous work they did spreading the gospel of Jesus after his death, and all but one (St. John) suffering martyrdom as a consequence. Reading today's gospel, however, we are struck by the fact that they started out being immature, weak men, with their own political and social ambitions, and a mentality that clashed with their Lord. We see Jesus, our Divine Teacher, very patiently teaching them the truth and preparing them for the future. This should give all of us tremendous hope. We can identify with the disciples in this gospel, and after seeing Jesus role modelling, we can appreciate the qualities of a good leader and teacher.

The recent readings have been focusing a lot on the inevitability and value of suffering. In today's gospel, Jesus foretells (for the third time) His own suffering – namely His death and resurrection. Hearing that their Messiah was going to die a sacrificial death would have been so shocking and alien to the disciples. By way of background, the Jewish people were expecting an “earthly, temporal” Messiah, who would, through force and might, restore Israel to its glory days, usher in a new kingdom, evict the Romans, and establish political and economic dominion far and wide. When Jesus had spoken of his Passion the first time, Peter had protested, and was silenced by Jesus. When He spoke the second time, they changed the subject, and now this third time, in their childish way, instead of confronting Jesus and asking Him for clarification (the gospel tells us they didn't understand), they didn't even want to ask Jesus what He meant; maybe they didn't want to know the answer, the truth.

After Jesus foretelling his Passion, we read about the disciples arguing about who was the greatest among them. We know that the disciples believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and now we learn that they were entertaining thoughts of riding on His coattails, and thinking about their own social advancement and political success. Maybe they believed that Jesus was training them for a future important role in his “cabinet”, so to speak. When Jesus asks them what they were arguing about on the journey “they remained silent”. This whole scene highlights the immaturity, even childishness, of the disciples, but in doing so, it enables us to empathize with their human failings. In spite of all the time the disciples had spent with Jesus, listening to His teaching, watching Him in action, they were still not exactly on the same page.

Jesus now starts to teach about a new concept of authority – that of service. In His Kingdom, there would be a new order. A new spirit would imbue those in positions of “authority”. It

would have been a commonly held belief back then, (and still is today), that authority should dominate rather than serve. But “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all”. In the new Kingdom, humility and dedication to the service of others are the guiding principles. In fact, we have to diminish ourselves, not increase ourselves.

The image of Jesus embracing a child (literally putting his arms around the child), demonstrated to the disciples, in a very visceral way, how Jesus is drawn to innocence, humility, and “smallness”. Omnipotence is drawn in by humility. Think of Our Lady.

Jesus’ Passion is the ultimate diminishment. The only Son of God, offered Himself up to be insulted, tortured, and crucified on a cross for us. Here we think of the passage in the first reading today “Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is.” One of the purposes of suffering is to diminish us, and in doing so, it is helping us be one with Jesus, be embraced by Him, and rise in the true hierarchy.

I am reminded of the first line of a hymn we used to sing in Ireland at the end of the Eucharist: “The Mass has ended, all go in peace; we must diminish and Christ increase.”

Let us pray for good leaders who embrace their role in the true spirit of service.

Sources used in preparing for this Reflection:

St. John Chrysostom, St. Bede, Fr. LaGrange, Msgr. J. S. Cla Dias