

HOMILY SUNDAY 29 – B
“Greatness through Suffering Service”
(Isaiah 53:4, 10-11; Ps 33; Heb 4:14-16; Mk 10:39-45)

A Sunday school teacher said to her children, "We have been learning how powerful kings and queens were in Bible times. But, there is a higher power. Can anybody tell me what it is?" A small hand went up immediately: "Aces!"

Have you ever dreamt of being important and even famous?

The way to greatness is humble, selfless loving service.

There is a saying, "God's ways are not our ways." The readings today are a clear reminder of that. The way of the world is to think that happiness lies in wealth, fame and power. It is this kind of thinking, this "hubris," that built empires like the Roman Empire. Much of what makes Rome interesting to tourists today are the ruins of the attempts at greatness in the past. There was even one emperor who made a gold, life size statue of himself.

We are all infected by this way of thinking. There is within us all, as there was in the disciples, a hungering for recognition, acclaim, glory, power and prestige. That drive all too easily finds its way into the Church, into religion. The disciples, James and John, were following Jesus, yet their prayer was self-centered, asking Jesus for power and glory.

Jesus uses this incident to teach a fundamental truth – the way to greatness in the Kingdom of God is humble, loving selfless service. Though that truth was foretold in the reading from Isaiah that speaks of a future servant of God who will save God's people from their sins through his suffering love, James and John struggle to understand, for they, like most of us, want just the opposite – power, fame and glory.

The way of Jesus is counter-cultural: humble, loving service. The way of the world is domination and power. In this teaching, Jesus is a revolutionary who lived his own teaching to the full by accepting the baptism of suffering on the cross, as foretold by the prophet Isaiah. That suffering gave birth to the Church, who as his disciples must accept humble, long-suffering service as a way of life, with the same attitude of joyful service as Jesus.

How can this be, we wonder? Certainly not by our own power, for we are weak and sinful. However, the second reading reminds us that we have Jesus, our High Priest, who as one of us was tested and tried in every way that we are, but without sin. We must turn to him for the power (or grace) to serve and even to suffer and we will be able to live this way, his way. The psalm affirms this truth – place our trust in the Lord and we will be able to achieve greatness through selfless suffering service.

Lillian Yonkers was president of Oblate College in San Antonio, Texas. The group of priests and sisters who had completed a renewal program at Ministry to Ministers in San Antonio were told that she would be coming to their closing banquet. Indeed, there was an extra place set at the table for her. However, the banquet started without her. The participants were somewhat bemused, wondering why she had not come, when suddenly she appeared out of the kitchen, dressed with an apron. She had come, not as the guest of honour, but as one who would serve their tables. The participants were surprised and delighted, yet also humbled – the president of the college was serving them. What an example of discipleship – truly following the teachings of Jesus

The Eucharist we celebrate today is a banquet in which Jesus once again serves us – his selfless love shown on the cross is made present through his Word, and also in humble gifts of bread and wine, transformed into his body and blood. And we who receive him are empowered to go out and to live as he did.

So remember, the way to greatness is not power and glory, but humble, selfless, loving service of our brothers and sisters in need, willing to accept even suffering for the sake of the Kingdom.