

Homily of Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B, 2021

Isaiah 53:10-11; Psalm 33:3-5, 18-18, 20, 22; Hebrews 4:14-16; Mark 10:35-45

In the first reading, Isaiah gave a prophecy of the kind of Messiah who was to come. The Messiah would leave his glory and come into the world to suffer infirmity and affliction. He would be crushed. He would bear the world's guilt, and give his life for the salvation of the world. He would "not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The Messiah would do nothing for his personal gain.

This was in contrast to the thoughts of the apostles. The apostles, clearly, looked forward to gaining something by following Jesus. In the last Sunday's gospel, Peter asked Jesus the reward of those who gave up everything and followed him (Mark 10:20). The apostles believed that Jesus was a political messiah. That was why in today's gospel, James and John, the sons of Zebedee requested, "Grant that in your glory we sit one at your right and the other at your left" (Mark 10:37). James and John, like the other disciples, believed that Jesus would carry out a revolution, overthrow the Romans and restore the kingdom and glory of Israel. That was why they talked about the glory of Jesus. They were, surely, not thinking about the heavenly glory of Jesus.

The other apostles who felt outsmarted by James and John became indignant towards them. Jesus used that opportunity to present a powerful message on leadership and relationship to them and to us. "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all" (Mark 10:42-44).

The readings of today have some lessons for us:

- Am I trying to outsmart anyone? Am I trying to push someone out of a position and take over? Am I selfish or greedy by trying to take to myself what belongs to a group? Am I using my position to cheat, or show favoritism? How transparent am I? Jesus says in Luke 12:15, "Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions."
- Am I lording it over, bullying, or harassing anyone? Am I making my 'authority' felt among those I am supposed to look after or take care of?
- Am I involved in or do I encourage unhealthy competition? Scripture says, "We must consider how to rouse one another to love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24).
- Am I indignant against anyone? Have I remained in prolonged anger against anyone? Am I unable to forgive someone? St. Paul advises us, "Do not let the sun set on your anger and do not leave room for the devil" (Ephesians 4:27). Jesus does not want us to pray with unforgiven heart. He says, "When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance, so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you your transgressions" (Mark 11:25).

Jesus says, "whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all" (Mark 10:43-44). Do I see my role as a servant or a lord? Am I a ruler or a leader? Do I love to serve or do I love to be served? In John 13:14, Jesus enjoins us, "If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet." We may not be crucified on the cross as Jesus was crucified. But as his disciples, our own greatest 'messianic' role is to love and serve one another. Through love and service, in our own little way, we will 'justify' many.

Let us conclude by praying with the second reading. Jesus, our high priest was tested in every way. He triumphed over all the tests. So, we have a high priest who understands our situations and able to sympathize with our weaknesses. We all are being tested in many ways. Let us not fight this world's battle alone. "For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens" (Ephesians 6:12). The Lord is strong and mighty; he is mighty in battle (Psalm 24:8). Let us, therefore, confidently, approach him for timely help, bringing to him all our trials and temptations. He is the throne of grace. He will grant us grace and mercy. Amen.

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