

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 21, 2018

Isaiah 53:10-11/Hebrews 4:14-16/Mark 10:35-45

DRINKING THE CUP THAT JESUS DRANK

The American psychologist William James once wrote: *There is no worse lie than a truth misunderstood by those who hear it.* The apostles in today's gospel embarrassingly give credence to his statement. They eagerly received the promise of glory and the vision of greatness to which Christ called them, but they sorely misunderstood the means by which they were to attain that truth. Like children fighting over the biggest piece of birthday cake, they pleaded with Jesus: *See to it that we sit at your right hand and your left, when you come into your glory.* However, when they discovered that the customary places of honor at Jesus' right and left were not yet at a banquet table, but on Golgotha, the hill of the cross, the once-eager followers were conspicuous by their absence. The ones who said they could drink from the same cup as Jesus found it bitter to the taste.

Our challenging passage from Mark's gospel comes immediately after Jesus predicts his passion for the third time. He had just finished telling his followers: *the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes; they will condemn him to death... he will be mocked and spat upon, and flogged and killed.* Even after so blunt a message as to what they can expect in the very near future, James and John still have the audacity to approach Jesus with their desire for power and glory, for the imagined perks of their office. *There is no worse lie than a truth misunderstood by those who hear it.*

This gospel story is a very revealing one. It tells us three things. First of all, it tells us **something about the gospel writer Mark**. This same passage is found in the gospel of Matthew. Do you recall the difference? In Matthew's version it's the mother of James and John who makes the request of Jesus for first places for her sons. Matthew must have felt that such a request was unworthy of an apostle, and to save the reputation of James and John, he attributed it to the natural ambition of their mother. [Poor mothers! they're always taking the blame.] This version shows us the honesty of Mark. It was Mark's aim to show us the disciples, warts and all. And Mark was right, because the Twelve were not a company of saints. They were ordinary people. It was with people like ourselves that Jesus set out to change the world -- and did it.



Then, the gospel story tells us **something about James and John**. They were ambitious young men – ‘social climbers.’ When Jesus' victory was complete they wanted to be the chief ministers of state. Maybe their ambition was kindled by the fact that Jesus included them in his inner circle more than once. With Peter, they were the ones who went

up to the mountain and saw Jesus transfigured. They were the special three. The gospel implies that their father must have been a wealthy man; he had hired servants to work for him. Remember when Jesus first called them to follow him? They left their father in the boat with the hired servants. Perhaps they felt they were better off than the other disciples and that their social superiority entitled them to the first place. Whatever the case, they possessed in their hearts ambition for the honored seats in an earthly kingdom.

Even though Jesus had spoken to them so plainly about his ultimate rejection and death, his direct words were powerless to rid them of the idea of a Messiah of earthly power and glory. Only the cross could do that. Today's gospel story does allow one thing about James and John to shine through -- they still believed in Jesus. Even knowing that the Pharisees and religious leaders were plotting against him, even knowing Jesus' prediction of the cross, they still had an amazing confidence and loyalty. Misguided James and John might have been, but their hearts were in the right place. They never doubted Jesus ultimate triumph.



Finally, today's gospel tells us **something about Jesus** and his standard of greatness. In Jesus' company human standards are reversed. Those who want to rank first must serve the rest. Human expectations about importance and

privilege are turned upside down. The followers of Jesus who would attain greatness are those who are able to endure disappointments along the way. They are able to suffer sometimes, to put up with pain, whether physical or emotional, and overcome obstacles. To achieve greatness in the spirit of the gospel is to be willing to serve and to take seriously this revolution that Jesus preached. Many have in the past and many still are today.

I'm personally inspired each day when I observe and experience the unselfish generosity of so many of you in our parish family. Lots of people gave their time and support for our recent Oktoberfest -- working long hours and contributing significantly so that the community could enjoy a good time together and continue to prosper. The parents of our school children, the volunteer efforts of our catechists, our volunteer CYO coaches, the commitment of our parish staff, the time, energy and financial support that is making out Capital Campaign for a new Community Center possible, the prayer that is offered by so many of you each day -- there are signs everywhere around us that you take to heart Jesus' command to put others before yourself.

Among the many examples of servant-leadership in the manner of Jesus, today one in particular is very evident to me this weekend -- the life of longtime parishioner Bryan Inderrieden whose funeral mass we celebrated today. As a member of the Knights of Columbus, Bryan eagerly gave his time to all the events and efforts of the Knights which would serve the community. He was especially committed to the annual Tootise Roll Drive which he chaired, the profits of which went to

support adults with intellectual challenges. Bryan was a man for others, always willing to serve.

I think the word serve can bother us because we commonly associate it with activity that is low-paying or demeaning. But the sense in which our Lord uses the term service includes any act that is noble and unselfish, any gesture that affirms and encourages someone, any deed that is done with kindness and thoughtfulness toward others. We who would stand with James and John and ask the Lord to fulfill his promises and to share his glory with us must face the same question they did: *Can you drink of the cup that Jesus drinks?*



- Can we aspire to greatness by putting our own concerns second to the needs of others?
- Can we build the glorious church of Jesus Christ by accepting our own flawed and imperfect selves as its very building blocks?
- Can we make our homes places of welcome and joy by trying to listen to each other with love and treating each other with mutual respect?
- Can we renew the face of an unjust and violent-torn earth by challenging ourselves and our systems to move away from a "me-first" attitude -- an arrogance which lords it over others -- and towards a greater gospel vision of justice for all?

We can if we follow the formula of one person who said:

*Do a little more than you need to;
Give a little more than you have to;
Try a little harder than you want to;
Aim a little higher than you think possible.
Then, the glory of God will indeed be ours.*

John Kasper, OFS

