

HOMILY for 29th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year B

This Sunday's Gospel tells us how two of the Apostles wanted to have a position of honor in the Kingdom of God; & their selfish ambition caused a fight with the rest of the Apostles. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

It was snack time at Sunday school & the teacher was getting ready to hand out giant chocolate chip cookies. Two young brothers began to argue over who would get the first cookie. The teacher saw an opportunity for a moral lesson: "If Jesus were here, He would say, 'Let my brother have the first cookie. I can wait.'"

The older boy turned to his brother & said, "You be Jesus!"

Anyway, we often assume that the early twelve apostles were saintly & virtuous. They would not fight with one another or do something that might disappoint Jesus their Master. The truth is that they all did something wrong at some point, but later most of them realized their sins & came back to the Lord to ask for forgiveness. We all know about Judas the infamous disciple who sold out Jesus for thirty pieces of silver & betrayed Him as we have been told in the Gospels. He definitely disappointed Jesus & incurred His rare curse that we have read every Holy Week, namely, "The Son of Man is following out His appointed course; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed. It is better that he should have never been born." Another disciple who let down Jesus & denied knowing Him as he was confronted by a hostile person was Peter. However, unlike Judas, Peter later realized his wrongdoing & came back to Jesus to beg for forgiveness. In case we still have any doubt about the human sinfulness of the early twelve Apostles, this Sunday's Gospel shares with us an occasion where two disciples made their own ambition known & came to Jesus with a request, "Teacher, we want you to grant our request... See to it that we sit one at your right & the other at your left, when you come into your glory." The Gospel continues, "...The other ten, on hearing this, became indignant at James & John."

As you can see, these two sons of Zebedee were selfish & eccentric as they tried to build their own future ambition without any concern about the other ten Apostles. Their selfishness brought out the worst in the rest of the Apostles & caused a big fight within Jesus' inner circle. For they all care about their own ambition & ignored the needs of their neighbors & community. If a selfish ambition could cause that much rumble among the early Apostles, can you imagine how other deadly sins such as envy & greed would do to a community? In case you have not paid attention to the destructive power of sin in our human community yet, let me point out how it has done to our political, business, & Church leaders.

We have seen how envy & greed has caused our political leaders to fight & hang on to their power instead of humbly serving their communities & making personal sacrifices for the common good. The same thing is true with some bishops & Church leaders as they simply look out for their own ambition & power instead of serving the poor & Jesus' mission of salvation. Of course, we have seen terrible consequences of business leaders' envy & greed in our society. Their sins have created the injustices & division between the rich & the poor around the world. Indeed, these leaders have caused terrible damages to their communities & brought out the worst in themselves & all of us. For these leaders & all of His disciples, Jesus gives this advice in today's Gospel, "You know how among the Gentiles those who seem to exercise authority lord it over them; their great ones make their importance felt. It cannot be like that with you."

Anyone among you who aspires to greatness must serve the rest; whoever wants to rank first among you must serve the needs of all. The Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve – to give His life in ransom for many.”

As you can see, Jesus asks us to follow a life of service & virtues to avoid all the fights & corrupted way of life in our human culture. He shows us a new way of living that would bring peace & prosperity to a community & the best out of each one of us. Our current leadership in politics & in the Church has brought the worst out of all of us & created all sorts of fights & divisions in our communities. In fact, Jesus has given us His own example of service & virtues as He went from town to town to heal the sick, feed the hungry, & lift up the hopeless. He even washed the feet of His disciples at the Last Supper & commanded them to do the same for one another. He ultimately offered His own life on the Cross to make up for our sins & prepare a place in Heaven for us.

Indeed, today’s First Reading recalls His life of service & virtues as following, “... If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life; & the will of the Lord shall be accomplished through him... Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many; & their guilt he shall bear.” Meanwhile, today’s Second Reading continues to praise our Lord’s example of service & virtues like this, “...For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our own weakness, but one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet never sinned. So, let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy & favor & to find help in time of need.” So, Jesus followed a life of service & virtues to sympathize with our own suffering & daily struggles. Moreover, He did that to inspire us to do the same & change our current world in a positive way. When we serve our families & communities, we defy the sinful way of the world & follow the way of Jesus. His way will surely bring peace & prosperity to our home, Church, nation, & community.

My dear brothers & sisters, a life of service & virtues is not easy to do. In fact, it is the road less travel. But, that is the one that our Lord took: & He would like to invite us to follow along. For it will bring peace & prosperity to the communities around us. It will also eventually lead us to Heaven. That is why some Christians have taken that road & challenged themselves to be missionaries by traveling to a third-world country to serve the poor & the suffering. This weekend the Church calls us to honor them & support their mission by celebrating World Mission Sunday. Perhaps we might not be missionaries like them; but we certainly can participate in their mission of service & salvation by our prayers & financial contribution. Furthermore, we could commit to a life of service & virtues by helping out our families & communities every chance possible & one day will receive our abundant rewards in the Kingdom of Heaven.