

HOMILY for 25th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year B

In this Sunday Gospel, Jesus tells us to welcome a child for His sake. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

A little girl was asked to pray during Sunday School. She hesitated for a moment, then began to recite the Alphabet.

"What are you doing, Sophia?" the teacher interrupted.

"I can't think of what to say," the young girl explained. "So, I'm just saying all the letters I know & God can put them together however He wants."

Anyway, this Sunday's Gospel continues the story of Jesus' revelation about His upcoming suffering & death for the sake of our human salvation. Unfortunately, like Peter, all the disciples could not comprehend Jesus' entire plan of salvation through His suffering & Cross. They were bored on that topic of suffering & the Cross & decided to discuss on who would be the most important person in Jesus' eyes. Here is Jesus' response to it in today's Gospel, "...He sat down & called the Twelve around Him & said, 'If anyone wishes to rank first, he must remain the last one of all & the servant of all.' Then, He took a little child, stood him in the midst, & putting His arms around him, said to them, 'Whoever welcomes a child such as this for my sake welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me welcomes, not me, but Him who sent me.'" So, evidently Jesus wants us to know that if we wish to be the first/the greatest in the Kingdom of God, we must learn to be the servant. This new teaching is quite a challenge for most of us. Like the early disciples & the tendency of our world, we all want to be the first/the greatest by being the boss, not the servant. For it takes humility, lots of personal sacrifices, & a service attitude to be a servant. Only people with a servanthood spirit can enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Then, Jesus put a little child in their midst & called on His disciples to welcome unimportant people like that for His sake. What was Jesus trying to tell us? I'm sure you've heard the saying, "Children should be seen, & not heard." That saying tells us that we could recognize children, but we should not let them participate fully in an event. Jesus certainly disagreed with that & asked us to treat all children with kindness & respect as if we would do it to Him. In other words, He wants us to serve the least among us like the children if we want to be the first/the greatest in His Kingdom. Like I said above, some of us do not like to serve; hence this new teaching of Jesus would be a challenge for us. Furthermore, we often ignore the lowly & the marginalized. Yet, many stories of Jesus' revelation in our Catholic tradition tell us that Jesus often appeared in the images of a child, or a poor person. Remember the story of St. Christopher who helped carry a child across the river? Jesus evidently took on the image a child asking St. Christopher to carry him across a river. But, the child seemed to weigh a ton & became a heavy burden for St. Christopher to fulfill his task. St. Christopher wanted to give up on that task; yet he soldiered on. After making it safely to the other side, St. Christopher learned that the child was Jesus Himself. We have certainly heard many stories on how Jesus also has taken on the image of the poor to test us on the way we would treat them. So, if we treat the lowly & the marginalized like we do to Jesus, then He would consider us to be the first/the greatest in His Kingdom.

However, we all know that it's not easy for us to do humble acts & serve the least among us. One of the biggest reasons for it is our human pride. That innate sin has prevented

us from serving & living our Christian life in a humble way. Yet, it is not the only hurdle that would keep us from serving the lowly & the marginalized. St. James points out other problems for us in today's Second Reading as following, "Beloved: Where jealousy & selfish ambition exist, there is disorder & every foul practice... Where do the wars & where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members? You covet but do not possess. You kill & envy, but you cannot obtain; you fight & wage war." So, James thinks that jealousy & selfish ambition has caused all sorts of fights among ourselves & prevented us from serving Jesus in the lowly & the outcast. He calls us to avoid those sins, namely, jealousy & selfishness & stop all the related fights & foul practices. That is how we can maintain peace & justice in our community. That is how we would motivate ourselves & others to do more humble acts & serve the least among us.

Perhaps, the biggest hurdle that might keep us from acting humbly & following Jesus' new teaching is mentioned in this Sunday's First Reading. Here is how that hurdle is described to us: "[The wicked say:] Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law & charges us with violations of our training... For if the just one be the Son of God, He will defend him & deliver him from the hand of his foes. With revilement & torture, let us put him to the test... Let us condemn him to a shameful death; for according to his own words, God will take care of him." As you can see, we not only have to overcome our own sins of jealousy & selfishness but also need to have the courage to stand tall against all the taunting of a hostile world. For the wicked will continue to bully us & make us question our relationship with God. If we would like to reach out to the lowly & the marginalized like Jesus taught us, we got to have an intimate relationship with God & learn to act humbly & serve others faithfully in our own vocations.

My dear brothers & sisters, we all want to be the first/the greatest in God's Kingdom. But, in order for us to get there, we must learn to treat the lowly & the marginalized with care & respect. As Jesus reminded us in today's Gospel, when we serve the least among us, we serve not only Him but also God the Father. Let us keep that message in mind when we are tempted to ignore the plight of the lowly & the marginalized, or when we are tired of following a life of service to our community.