

## **Twenty Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2009**

Our society considers as great, people who have been successful in their lives. While some have done spectacular things, others have been distinguished by the quality of their service at the benefice of their fellows. Whatever might be the opinion of society, one thing is sure: without self-denial and sacrifice, abnegation and sometimes the quality of their commitment, these people would not have been praiseworthy. The readings of this Sunday invite us to meditate on what makes someone great beyond society criteria and human consideration.

The first reading tells the story of the suffering servant of the Lord. What makes this servant special is that he intentionally accepts to take on himself the sufferings and the guilt of others in order to bring them salvation. According to God's own will, he gives his life as an offering for sin. By accepting humiliation and affliction, he becomes the light for others and a source of life for them.

What this text teaches us is that Christian service implies sacrifice, self-denial and even the giving up of one's life for the good of others. But God, for whom all this is done, will not abandon his servant; he will protect him and honor him.

This prophecy of Isaiah has been fully fulfilled in the mission and the life of Jesus. That is why in today's Gospel, Jesus openly declares that he has come not to be served, but to give his life as ransom for many. Jesus lived and died for us as a suffering servant of the Lord. He gave up his life on the cross for us so that we live and be delivered from our sins.

Even though at the end of Jesus' passion and death came the resurrection, this way of living, however, is foremost a way of suffering and self-denial, and not that of easy glory. That should be clear in the minds of all those who accept to follow Jesus. It is always a misunderstanding to think that because we are Christians, we cannot suffer. Some have lost their faith in Jesus because they have been involved in human suffering. They have forgotten that there is no glory without suffering and sacrifice. It would be an illusion to think that Jesus has promised us an easy way to glory.

That explains the reaction of Jesus to the request of the two brothers who want privileged places in his Kingdom. The glory of Jesus comes out of sharing of one's blood for others. It is a glory that follows out of self-denial and service; it is not a glory that comes out of being served as the great of this world do.

Moreover, whoever wants to belong to Jesus should be ready to experience hatred, pain and death. That is what it means to drink his cup or be baptized in his baptism. In fact, Jesus wants to tell us that without a cross, there is no crown. The standard of the greatness in his kingdom is the cross and not otherwise. He tells us also that the ultimate issue belongs to his Father; but meanwhile we have to follow what he recommends us to do. Here we see the humility of Jesus and his submission to the Father. He does not usurp the place of God, his Father.

Jesus wants this lesson to be observed by all his disciples. That is the reason why he called the disciples to him and made clear to them the different standards in the kingdom of this world and

his kingdom. In the kingdom of the world, the standard of greatness is power and honor. In his kingdom, the standard of greatness is service and humility. In that sense, greatness consists not in reducing others to one's service, but in reducing oneself to the service of others.

The drama with us is that we tend naturally to be served than to want to serve. We want to do as little as possible and to get as much as possible. In the end, the principle of life given by Jesus seems strange to us. But in truth, it is only when we are filled with the desire to put into life more than we take out of that life for ourselves and for others that we can be happy and prosperous. We need people whose ideal is to serve unselfishly, without gain or calculation.

Here Jesus himself is our example, our model and challenge. It not a question of an idealistic Jesus, but of true Jesus, man and God. That Jesus knows that things can be difficult; but he knows also that with his grace and our effort, we can succeed. That is the picture we have of Jesus from the letter to the Hebrews.

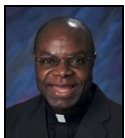
Jesus is our great high priest who comes from the Father. He went through everything a man can go through and is like us in all things, except that he emerged from it all completely sinless. The fact that Jesus was without sin means that he knew the tensions and assaults of temptations which we never can know. For us, before we even reach the fiercest part of the temptations we give in. But Jesus went to our limit of temptation and far beyond it and still did not collapse.

For that reason, Jesus is capable of sympathy towards us, because he knows what temptation means. Because he understands us, he is full of mercy toward us. Therefore, let us approach the throne of his grace to receive mercy and to find grace for the time of help.

When you have been there, it makes all the difference. And there is no human experience of which God cannot say "I have been there". When we have a sad and sorry story to tell, when life has drenched us with tears, we do not go to a God who is incapable of understanding what was happened; we go to a God who has been there. It is for that reason that God finds it easy to forgive.

Jesus knows our problems, because he has come from them. The best person to give you advice and help on a journey is someone who has travelled that road before you. Jesus can help because he knows all that. Jesus is the perfect high priest because he is perfectly man and perfectly God. Because he knows what it means to be human, he can give us his sympathy, mercy and help. Let us, then, turn to him in prayer for ourselves and our world, for our weaknesses and our sins. Let us open to the grace of forgiveness he brings us in the sacrament of confession and in the Eucharist. Let us learn from him what true grandeur and service mean. God bless you all!

**Is 53, 10-11; Hebrews 4, 14-16; Mark 10, 35-45**



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