

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2012

The readings of this Sunday contrast human grandeur with God's grandeur. They show us that the way that leads to true grandeur is the service of our fellows. They invite us to walk in the same path if we want to be counted great in the kingdom of heaven.

The first reading of the book of Isaiah describes the sufferings of the servant of the Lord. It shows that he has endured suffering for the sake of justifying many. It shows equally that the servant of God has offered his life for the sin and bore in his own body the guilt of others. Thanks to his sacrifice and affliction, the will of the Lord will be accomplished.

What is behind this text is the idea that salvation comes to us through the self-denial and the sacrifice of the servant of God. Another idea is the fact that by intentionally accepting to go through suffering and humiliation, the servant of God has brought light and life to the world.

This text helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus invites his disciples to show their greatness through service of others. First of all, the Gospel says that two of his disciples, namely the sons of Zebedee, James and John, wanted that Jesus grant them the favor of being in his glory at his right and left hand.

By this request, Jesus realized that they did not understand anything of the whole stake of his life. In turn, he asked them if they were able to share in his suffering and the terrible experience he had to go through. As they showed their willingness to do so, Jesus reassured them that even with this the whole state of affair belonged to his Father and not to him.

By hearing what was going on with the two brothers, the other disciples got upset. But, Jesus brought them to order by reminding them how they should be different from the way the great of this world exercise their authority. For them, whoever would like to be great should be the servant of others and the slave of all. After all, he is the example they have to follow because he has come not in order to be served, but rather to serve and to give his life for many.

What do we learn from this text? The only point I want to stress today is the importance of authority as service. In each one of us, indeed, there is a deep desire to be recognized, appreciated and honored, especially when we have done something valuable and successful in our undertaking. Such a desire is all normal and legitimate. It can even enhance our self esteem and encourage us so that we always look for the best in what we do.

Likewise, there is in almost each one of us a desire to be in authority. In fact, the course of life is such that in society, we already exercise authority in various domains of life as parents, teachers, catechists, priests, businessmen or women, etc. As in the first case, there is nothing wrong with all that.

However, the reasons for which people like to be in authority might differ from one individual to another. And it is here that there is a little bit of problem. In fact, some people like to be in authority, because it makes them important in the eyes of others. In that perspective, they are the bosses and others are under their rule. There are also people who like to be in authority because of the prestige it brings in their life and the

glory that goes with it. In that perspective, authority gives to their life a meaning they would not acquire if they did not have that position. For some others, authority and top jobs are interesting because of the financial benefits they can reap from them. In that perspective, authority becomes a source of gain and profit.

In all these cases, authority is seen especially as a chance to promote one's honor and glory. In the end, authority comes just to one aim, namely serving one's interests. As self-satisfying as it might be, such a conception of authority and grandeur is selfish. It was that conception of greatness which was operating in the two brothers who asked Jesus to put them at his right and left hand when he is in his glory.

For Jesus, on the contrary, authority is first of all and for most an opportunity to serve and to promote the good of others. It can never be for promoting one's interests and for searching for one's glory. It is for that reason that Jesus contrasts the way his disciples have to behave and the way the rulers of this world exercise their power.

By saying that, indeed, Jesus is not demonizing authority or the desire for grandeur. What he wants is that our desire for greatness, as legitimate as it might be, might be seen in the way we strive to do good to those under our direction, rather than in just focusing on our personal interests. That is why in Jesus' conception, grandeur has to do more with renunciation of power and the aspiration to serve others.

It is absolutely clear that Jesus' vision challenges us seriously with regard to the way we exercise our leadership on a daily basis. A true leader is the one who sacrifices in order to make others happy, and not the one who makes others feel his authority. If we really have no consideration for those under our authority, we degrade them and humiliate them, because in the end it comes to a subtle supposition that they have a duty to obey and we have the right to command. With all that in mind, we should never forget that even if people obey us outwardly, it does not mean that they do the same inwardly. They might despise us without us knowing it.

By saying this, I do not mean that in order to be good leader, we have to be easy or soft on those under our authority. The problem is all about the way we exercise that authority whether it becomes a burden on others or a way of helping them so that they come to the fulfillment of their aspiration. In this process, it also important to avoid imposing on others what we do not like ourselves. Otherwise, it would be a double standard in the exercise of our authority. Let us pray, then, that the Lord may help us to search for greatness through the service of our brothers and sisters. Let us ask him to help us desire above all what is beneficial to our fellows, rather than to focus on our own interests. God bless you all!

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



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