

LET ME BE YOUR SERVANT

Today's Gospel reminds me of when my son, Michael, and I went skiing. We were walking back to the hotel with our skis on our shoulder, and we were exhausted. Michael turned to me and said, "I call the shower". "Really." That is probably how the other ten apostles felt when James and John "called" the seats on the right and the left of Jesus. "Really!"

Michael was a teenager then, as were James and John in today's Gospel. It is easy to understand why they may have thought that their request was reasonable. Peter, James, and John formed the inner circle of apostles. They alone accompanied Jesus when He raised the daughter of Jairus. They alone were given the privilege to see Jesus in His glory at the transfiguration. Later they would also accompany Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.

When the victory was won, they wanted to be the chief ministers of state at Jesus' table. Their request was ambitious and more than a little audacious. In their blindness, they totally misunderstood the mission of Jesus. They thought that Jesus would become the Messiah of earthly power and glory, and they wanted to have some of that power.

I think it is important to remember that Jesus chose people like us to help Him change the world. Like James and John, we often come to Jesus asking Him to do for us whatever we ask. Many times we pray for things that will glorify us rather than glorify God. Many times we demand an answer from God when we should be learning to trust in Him. We must open our eyes to the vision of the Kingdom that is here among us, and know that we are chosen by name to participate in its fulfillment. If we are to share in His glory, we must also share in His way of life.

Jesus knew that James and John would have to understand the Cross before they could understand the Messiah. So he asks them, "Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

What He was saying is, "Can you bear to suffer as I will suffer? Can you face being submerged in hatred and pain and death, as I have to be?" He is telling these two

apostles that without the cross there can never be a crown. The standard of greatness in the Kingdom is the standard of the Cross.

Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized". James and John did suffer like Jesus. James was the first of the apostles to be martyred. He was beheaded by Herod Agrippa no later than the year 44 (Acts 12:2). Although John was probably not martyred, he suffered much for Christ. James and John accepted the will of their Master—even if they did so with little understanding.

Jesus told them, "... to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared." Jesus never usurped the place of His Father. His whole life was one long act of submission to His Father's will. That is the lesson his life teaches as we do our best to follow Him. We must submit to the will of our Father.

We too will suffer our cross. So, we must choose whether to become bitter, or to accept the cross that we are given. Like James and John, we will never understand the mystery of the cross, but every time we pray "Thy kingdom come thy will be done", we accept the will of the Father even though we do so with little understanding.

Finally, Jesus said to the twelve, "For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many".

To become a disciple of Jesus we too must give our life as a ransom for many. Our life is not ours to keep, it is the Lord's. We are just traveling through this world on our way to our eternal home. On the road we will meet others who live in darkness. We must choose whether to keep on walking, to become the light of Christ to them. Jesus paid the ransom for our life, and we are given the opportunity to respond in faith by helping another. If we want to be great in the kingdom of God we must follow the example of Jesus. We must become the servant of all.

Some of you know that we are developing a new ministry here at Saint Cecilia. We are training Stephen Ministers that will be available to "walk the mile" with someone in

need. We should finish the training sometime in early February. Their mission statement sums up the message that Jesus is giving us today. It is taken from Galatians 6.

"Bear one another's burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ."

God will place someone in our life who needs our help. That is His way of sharing His glory with us. When we do the will of our Father, He will send the joy of the Holy Spirit and we will have a foretaste of what it is like to live with Him in glory. As for the ones we serve, they are Christ to us even as we become Christ to them. When we do the will of the Father we are living as Jesus taught us, and we give the glory to God.

So:

May we ask only for the gifts that glorify God.

May we learn to accept the plan God has for us, even when we suffer.

May we become Christ to those who suffer even as they become Christ to us.

Deacon Alan Christy