

Homily for the 29th Sunday, Oct. 18, 2009

Intro: Suppose you had Jesus of Nazareth right in front of you now, and you had the opportunity to ask him in private for the thing you most want. What would you ask for? (I am going to give you a minute to ponder this...)

I suppose most of us began with something very immediate, maybe even very material, and found ourselves shifting to something more personal, even more spiritual. It's a great exercise, and I'll return to it at the end of this homily.

Mark shows us two brothers, disciples of Jesus even before the Twelve were chosen who come to Jesus with their request. First they want Jesus to give them whatever they want. But Jesus is too cagey for that: he asks them what they want done. They want to sit in the positions of power in the glory of the coming Kingdom of God. Jesus asks them if they can drink the cup of Jesus' passion, and they answer with false assurance that they can. (If is false assurance because when the time of Jesus' passion arrives they abandon him.) Jesus knows that they will eventually suffer for him, but he re teaches them that those who desire power will be least in the reign of God. "For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." With these words Jesus closes this section of Mark which began by Peter's proclaiming that Jesus is the triumphant Messiah Throughout the section Jesus teaches that he as the Son of Man will serve, suffer, and die, and only in this way rise to glory.

The Meaning for us:

The most important meaning is that Jesus challenges each of us to live lives not of self seeking but of serving others, as he had done. He is the Lord of heaven and earth and yet he came among us as a member of a despised nation, as a poor blue collar worker, who became an even poorer beggar as an itinerant preacher. When he proclaimed that this is the way of life for all humanity, his doctrine was too revolutionary to both Jewish and Roman self-seeking, and so they put him to death.

This seeking our own self aggrandizement is subtle. Regularly we find ourselves wanting to be in charge for our own benefit, to protect our self-image, to have things our way. I see this even in the clergy and bishops of the present-day Roman Catholic Church. I see it in so many ways in myself. Jesus' example is always needed and his message is always revolutionary, but life-giving.

Secondly, to get beyond this self-seeking we must return to where this homily began. The sons of Zebedee did not ask for wealth, or pleasure, but for positions of power right under Jesus. Perhaps our first request of Jesus was for money, maybe enough money to survive gracefully, maybe for a lot of money so that we could have everything that we want. And as we looked at Jesus and asked of him in prayer, probably our goals shifted to enough money to care for our family, or even to care for the poor in our midst. If we pray longer we might again find our desires shifting to something more significant. Perhaps we might ask that we truly be loving persons in our family, or even loving to those who irritate or even attack us.

If we persist, our desires will shift further, to wanting a life of prayer in which we could find Jesus or the Blessed Virgin in prayer. And if we persist in prayer throughout life, we might arrive at the point where we want to simply love God and do his will---“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” When we have arrived at this point, we have arrived at union with God, which is the object of our prayer.

What prayer does, then, is transform our desires. As we picture Jesus and ask him earnestly for what we want, his very presence before us causes our holier desires to emerge and become central for us. Eventually I stop asking for what *I want* (which is a subtle form of the power that John and James sought) and start asking for what *God wants* in me, and finally for what God wants everywhere in our world. I become God-like in my desires. And since we become what we desire, we begin to act like God; we become saints, part of God’s transformation of our world.

That’s what we are about, and don’t let anyone tell you differently. It is our vocation as humans, to become sons and daughters of God in Christ, feeling as He did, thinking as He did, and acting as He did. That’s why he became man.

God bless you with this great gift.