

Twenty Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

When someone we know comes up to us and says, 'Will you do me a favor?' we may hesitate to say 'yes' until we know what favor is being looked for. Saying 'yes' before we know what we are being asked might seem to us like writing a blank check. If we know someone really well and we trust that person, we just might say 'yes' before knowing in advance what is being asked.

In today's Gospel reading, James and John approach Jesus and say to him, 'Master, we want you to do us a favor'. Jesus didn't answer them by saying, 'Of course, I will'. He firstly wanted to know the favor they were asking of Him, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' And the favor was, 'Allow us to sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your kingdom'.

Their thoughts about the Kingdom of God were like if Jesus would be like the Caesar in Rome, and the brothers wanted to be his right hand and his left-hand men, occupying positions of power, prestige and privilege. **Even though they had been with Jesus for some time now and had seen how He lived and heard what He had been saying, they seem to have learned nothing.** They showed great ignorance of what Jesus was about.

As He says to them, 'You do not know what you are asking'. Whenever those who were broken in body, mind or spirit came to Jesus asking for a favor, for healing, Jesus didn't hesitate to respond to their request. However, when His own disciples came to Him looking for status and honor, He didn't hesitate to refuse their request. **Jesus did not seek status or honor for himself. On the contrary, as Saint Paul says, 'he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant'.** He emptied himself of everything the world considered important so as to serve God and God's people. That emptying of himself was at its most complete as he hung from the cross. At that moment, everything had been taken from him. It was the most shameful and degrading form of death imaginable at the time. He was mocked as a King, and those on his right and on his left, the places James and John wanted, were condemned criminals, (with James and John and the others nowhere to be seen.)

Jesus knew where his life was leading and what this would mean for His disciples, which is why He asked James and John, 'Can you drink the cup that I must drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I must be baptized?' Jesus was trying to create a different community from the society of that the time.

The same Jesus calls on us, His Church, to relate to one another in the way He has related to us and continues to relate to us. He wants the lives of His followers to conform to His view of greatness. Those who are able to humble will serve the Lord forever, and this begins with serving their brothers and sisters.