

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Gospel text (Mk 10:35-45): James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." He replied, "What do you wish me to do for you?" They answered him, "Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" They said to him, "We can." 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; but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared."

When the ten heard this, they became indignant at James and John. Jesus summoned them and said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

«Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant»

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Today, once more, Jesus overturns our schemes. Stirred by James and John, these words full of wisdom reach us: "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life" (Mk 10:45).

We certainly like to be properly served! Let us just think of how we can expect all public services to be efficient, punctual and clean; or how we can complain when, having paid for a certain service, we do not receive the expected compensation. Jesus Christ teaches us with his own example: He not only does his Father's will, that includes our Redemption, but on top of it He bears a terrible cost! It is with his Blood through which our sins have been redeemed. A great paradox we shall never fully understand! He, the great King, the Son of David, who was to come in the name of the Lord, "rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; (...) becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:7-8).

How expressive are the images of Christ on the Cross donning garments befitting a King nailed to the Cross! In our country we have quite a few; it is what we call "Their Most Holy Majesties." In a sort of catechesis, we can appreciate how to serve is to reign and how the exercise of any authority must always be a service.

Jesus overturns so much this world's categories that He gives an entire new approach to human activities. The most praiseworthy assignment is no better than the smallest job we can carry out to identify ourselves with Christ; with more love for God and for our brothers. If we truly believe that "no one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13), then we can also make the effort of offering with our work a service of human quality and professional competence, imbued with a profound Christian attitude of service. As Saint Teresa of Calcutta used to say: "The fruit of silence is prayer, the fruit of prayer is faith, the fruit of faith is love, the fruit of love is service, the fruit of service is peace."