

“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.” Words from our Gospel today from the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy...

One of the questions that I have been contemplating while listening to the readings at Mass over the last couple of months is, “What is it that makes Christians different in the world?” I ask that question, “What makes Christians different from everybody else?” because many of our Scripture passages that we’ve heard from lately have referred directly to what makes us Christians unique. Let me give you a few examples:

- In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says love your enemies, for if you love only those who love you, what reward will you get? Even the pagans do the same. It seems to me that Jesus is declaring that Christian love is to entail something altogether more than the self-interested kind of love espoused by the world. Certainly loving those who won’t necessarily reciprocate that love is challenging indeed.
- Again in St. Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus says, do not worry about what we are to eat or what we are to drink, for the Gentiles seriously concern themselves with these things. Your heavenly Father knows all that you need, so seek first the Kingdom of God and these things will be given to you besides. Therefore, Christians prioritize things in their lives differently than nonbelievers, termed here as Gentiles, and in so realizing that they are being cared for by God, shouldn’t have cause for worry.
- Jesus in the Gospel of Luke tells his disciples, when praying, don’t babble on like the pagans do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words; thus, Christian prayer should be relational and come from the heart.
- Finally, today Jesus tells us in Mark’s Gospel 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. The secular world is self-serving, using power and fame and success to promote their own interests. Over and against the ways of the world, Jesus is telling us today that Christians are to view power and greatness through the lens of service after the example of Christ who himself came to put others first, even to the point of giving up his life.

These readings give us pause to think about what makes us unique, and what we as Christians can offer to a world that is struggling to love; what we can offer to people who are anxious about many things or don’t have a relationship with God; or how we as Christians are supposed to lead others to greatness by our humble service. As I hear all these verses about what specifically makes Christians different, I am realizing that I have likely discovered only the

tip of the iceberg of the many things that make us unique. Indeed, there are probably just as many good personal reflections on this topic. I imagine one of our parishioners struggling with cancer might be more interested in how Catholic hospitals come to regard their patients with the care of Christ and the role of faith in healing, while some of our school parents realize and desire the unique value of a Catholic School education for their children. It could be that there are a million other ways of how our Catholic Christian faith makes our way of life unique. It might be good for us to think more deeply about this, for Christians are called to live differently, and a good kind of different at that... but are we doing so?

Not too long ago, there was a Lutheran Pastor by the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was renowned for standing up to the evils of the Nazi Regime during World War II, but he was also known for criticizing the many lackadaisical and halfhearted Christians living with him in Germany. He recognized, unfortunately, that the largely Christian populace was simply going along with the rest of the crowd and that instead of espousing Gospel values, Germany's many Christians voiced their support for the political and social practices of the world, enabling the events of the Holocaust. Such Christians were no longer different. And if those who follow Christ in his service could no longer offer anything unique, then what's the point of being Christian at all, when any belief will do? These folks were happy to call themselves Christians so long as it didn't interfere with their daily lives. It's like James and John in today's Gospel, who desired the places of honor and power that came from being in Jesus' company, but were reluctant to pick up their cross and follow in his way. We also like the idea of God's grace that derives from our Christian faith, but there are times when we would rather not invest ourselves in the distinctive service and way of life that Jesus asks of his disciples. Dietrich Bonhoeffer characterized this phenomenon as the cheapening of grace, saying with contempt, "the essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid by the Son of God who gave everything on the cross, that in turn everything can be had for nothing. What would grace be if not cheap? Grace alone does everything so they say, and so everything can remain as it was before. Well, then, let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world's standards in every sphere of life, and not presumptuously aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life of sin. Let such a Christian rest content with his worldliness and with this renunciation of any higher standard than the world. This kind of grace, cheap grace, is the deadly enemy of our Church."

Does our Christianity look different from the way the world lives or have we watered down our faith to the point where it doesn't mean anything to anyone anymore. Are we too cheap to appreciate the value of God's costly favor toward us, or do we invest ourselves in this relationship and in this life of grace? Today, Jesus is sharing with us his vision of how the Christian way of life is to be different, over and against the troubling ways of the world, and calling us deeper into this unique way of life. Indeed, Jesus is giving us a share in the honors of discipleship, of his glorious kingship, if only we would give ourselves over in service to others.

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 146

Reading 1 [IS 53:10-11](#)

The LORD was pleased
to crush him in infirmity.

If he gives his life as an offering for sin,
he shall see his descendants in a long life,
and the will of the LORD shall be accomplished through him.

Because of his affliction
he shall see the light in fullness
of days;
through his suffering, my servant shall justify many,
and their guilt he shall bear.

Responsorial Psalm [PS 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22](#)

R. (22) Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Upright is the word of the LORD,
and all his works are trustworthy.

He loves justice and right;
of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him,
upon those who hope for his kindness,
To deliver them from death
and preserve them in spite of famine.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Our soul waits for the LORD,
who is our help and our shield.

May your kindness, O LORD, be upon us
who have put our hope in you.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Reading 2 [HEB 4:14-16](#)

Brothers and sisters:

Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,
Jesus, the Son of God,
let us hold fast to our confession.

For we do not have a high priest
who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,
but one who has similarly been tested in every way,
yet without sin.

So let us confidently approach the throne of grace
to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.

Alleluia [MK 10:45](#)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The Son of Man came to serve
and to give his life as a ransom for many.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel 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."