

21st Sunday after Trinity - Year B
Isaiah 53:10-11; Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 10:35-45
A Sermon by Saji Dominic

Today's Gospel has two beautiful themes.

Firstly, the trust and confidence of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, in the glory of Jesus and secondly, the teaching of Jesus to be practiced in His kingdom to attain glory. James and John approached Jesus with a request:

"Teacher, grant us to sit one at your right hand and one at your left in your glory."

James and John had witnessed, many times, the opposition that Jesus faced from the religious leaders and the bitterness of the clergy.

They sensed the dangers that awaited Jesus on His way ahead but, in spite of them all, they still connected glory with a Galilean carpenter.

This showed amazing confidence and loyalty.

The challenges that James and John faced continued to be the challenges of every Christian throughout the ages, but take different, contemporary forms.

For example, the challenges of dogmas and writings, challenges raised by philosophies, political systems, attitudes and so on. However, the confidence of James and John in the Ultimate Triumph of Jesus should inspire us to also aspire for greatness.

The passage also tells us about the standard of Greatness in the Kingdom of Jesus when Jesus places before us the concept of the servant leader.

In the Kingdom of Jesus, the standard was that of service.

Greatness consisted not in reducing others to one's service, but in reducing oneself to their service. He overturns all our values, teaching us that true greatness consists in loving, humble, and sacrificial service.

Jesus at his final meal before his death, he scandalizes his followers by kneeling before them to wash their feet as though he is their servant and not their Lord.

For Jesus, true service means putting our gifts at the disposal of others and that greatness consists, not in what we have or what we can get from others, but in what we do and give to others.

He summarized His own mission in one sentence: "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many."

Hannibal Barca, a military commander of the Carthage army in 216 BC, was a good example of such a leader. He led a famous campaign in the second Punic War against the Roman army and remained undefeated until the very gates of Rome. His most famous battle was that of Cannae, where he defeated a Roman army double the size of his. The secret of his success was that he led by example. He would eat and sleep with his soldiers and would not wear anything that would identify himself as above his soldiers. He would lead them into battle and be the last to leave the battlefield. Even today he stands as a role model for leadership.

My dear brothers and sisters, as Christians, we are all invited to serve others and to serve with a smile!

We are challenged to drink the cup of Jesus by laying down our lives in humble, sacrificial service for others, just as Jesus did.

The best places to begin the process of service is in our own homes and workplaces.

When parents sacrifice their time, talents, health and blessings for the welfare of their family, they are serving God.

Service may often involve personal suffering, to some degree, but we can, also, give great service to others by presenting them and their needs before God in our daily prayers.

Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa gave of their whole self to the very lowest, treating them as brothers and sisters and living close to them. This is the lesson that the Church places before us today. This is the lesson that the Saints have put into practice and achieved greatness. This is the lesson that the world expects from the followers of Jesus and is the only lesson that can take us to greatness.

However, in order to achieve this genuine greatness, we should have confidence in ourselves just as James and John expressed confidence when they requested Jesus to grant them a place on his right and left.

In the kingdom of Jesus, greatness is gained by service and, today, the world needs people who's ideal is service.

Let us be among them and may God Bless each one of us.