

Readings for October 17, 2021 – 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

## *Greatness Comes From Humility*

*Jesus calls us to live and act with great humility, putting others first. This is not easy, of course, but Jesus gives himself as the perfect example and role model.*

---

**Opening Prayer:** Come Holy Spirit, breathe in us, draw our hearts closer to you as we pray, learn and share together. Guard our hearts, and lead us always toward the example of Jesus, putting others first. Amen.

Reading I **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 II **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.

Gospel **Mk 10:35-45 or 10:42-45**

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."

## *Related Reflections*

Jesus is saying several things here that are very important for our daily lives.

Here are two close followers of Jesus. They have walked with him for some time. Yet, their request is a selfish one. They want an assurance of position and power when Jesus enters his kingdom. They are obviously still thinking in a human, self-centered manner and they are bold to so directly ask for themselves. Put yourself in the place of James and John: What would you have requested and how would you have done it? What does your answer say about your priorities?

Notice next that Jesus doesn't respond to their request, but asks them another question. I am sure he looked at them intently because he was always trying to help them penetrate the superficial. But somehow, they didn't see. Why do I surmise this? Because Jesus could read their thoughts. He knew what they were going to ask. I am sure he was praying that they could receive the powerful truths he was about to convey. (Whenever you read a Gospel passage where Jesus is asking people questions, put yourself in their place and answer the question as honestly as you can before you go on to Jesus' answer. It will tell you a great deal about yourself.)

If Jesus asked you the question: "What do you wish me to do for you?" what would you say? Would it be a selfish request? Would it be something to meet a personal need or of someone you love? There is a place for bringing needs, personal or otherwise, to the Lord. He loves to have us come to him with our needs. But is that the first thing you bring to the Lord?

What he wants most is that you share eternal life with him! So, the first things we ought to be asking for are those things that can best help us to grow in a personal relationship with Jesus – overcoming sin, growing in virtue, so that we more and more look and act like him. His Holy Spirit longs to help us to hunger and thirst for the most important things first. So, stop here for a bit and think: If Jesus asked me today what he could do for me, how would I respond?

Now, we look at the disciples' request: Oh my! Do you hear yourself? They probably reasoned they were sacrificing much to follow him so there must be some reward coming. It probably didn't help that their own mother was "egging" them on. Nevertheless, their question shows they really don't yet understand who Jesus is and what he is asking of his followers. They are up front about their request but their thinking is earthbound. What about yours? Are all your goals for this life only? How are you preparing for the life you will live forever?

Jesus' answer to their question – "You do not know what you are asking" – shows how far they yet have to go in the conversion of their minds and hearts. Notice, Jesus doesn't just ignore their request or treat them as dumb for having asked. He teaches them, but they are slow to learn.

His next question reveals how far they – and we – have to go. Can you drink the cup? In other words, can you fully share in my life and drink to the bottom the suffering and ridicule and mockery and hatred you will encounter? Can you drink the cup by fully laying down your life?

Notice that, very glibly, they say, "We can." How quick sometimes we are to promise God or others great deeds!

Jesus tells the disciples, "You will drink my cup." He knows that with all their frailty and self-centeredness, their hearts do desire to love him and be with him. He knows they will follow him to the end and will sacrifice all eventually. God can work with good desires – as long as we clearly see our weaknesses and rely on God, not self, for the wisdom and strength to carry out what we promise.

Note, too, that the other disciples were indignant: How could James and John make such a request? Probably, one or two wondered that, but I wonder if their indignation didn't stem from a secret desire to ask the same. James and John had beat them to it. Think about that!

But, Jesus also makes clear, "I cannot promise what you ask." All of that is the decision of my Father.

One more huge lesson remains in this passage: If you want to be my disciple, you need to serve humbly. You need to learn how to put the needs of others before your own. You need to be willing to give whatever service is needed – not just how you want to serve. Even, and perhaps especially, in positions of authority, we need to see that role as one of service – real service, however it is needed.

We need to become more like our Master, who did not come to be served but to serve. James and John both learned their lessons very well. Can we?

*– Sister Ann Shields, Diocese of Lansing (Nov. 2010)*

James and John understand that they can't get for themselves what they want, which was to share in Jesus' glory. But they don't understand what leads to Jesus' glory. It does not come from placing himself above, but by humbling himself all the way to the cross. And Jesus invites us to the same humility which will lead us to be sharers in his glory. If Christ could humble himself, who are we not to?

*(Fr. Brad Held, S.J. – Jesuitprayer.org)*

To James and John, Jesus says, “Can you drink the cup that I drink?” This is the cup that Jesus prayed might pass from him. It is his crucifixion. So James and John have the right idea of glory. Perhaps they are not asking for thrones in heaven, as the other apostles think they are. They are asking whether they might be crucified with Jesus, on either side of him.

And here is the most powerful thing to notice in this story. Jesus does not rebuke James and John for their request. He grants it. They will drink his cup with him.

But Jesus does deny their request to be beside him in his glory. That gift is already prepared by God for others, Jesus says. And which others? Well, for those two thieves, crucified on either side of Jesus. Who else?

God did not give that great gift that James and John wanted to any of the apostles, but to two unknown, low-down, petty criminals.

And what happened? One of those thieves wasted the gift. The other one was glorious, wasn't he?

*Eleonore Stump, St. Louis University*

---

*“Consider that suffering can stretch and widen the human soul, making it large enough to know God, to live for others, to let in that which is greater than death or life: love. Love stays even when life does not.”*

*Fr. John Foley, S.J.*

*“Humans do not have the patience or the humility of God. We want things done as fast as possible to achieve our immediate goals. Spiritual power, however, is the ability to influence events and others through our very being. Evolved people change others interiorly through who they are, and through their sharing of wisdom, rather than through mere external pressure. It is a slower process, but much more long-lasting.”*

— from the book [Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality](#) by Richard Rohr, OFM

---

## *Discussion Questions*

Talk more about what Jesus means when he says “Can you drink the cup that I drink.” What is Jesus' cup like at this point in his human life? What else might he be referring to?

Does he explain a little more about the cup that he drinks when he encourages them to be servants? What does the cup of Jesus' life look like for us?

The disciples, James and John did not know what they were saying yes to when they said they could drink the cup that Jesus offered them. What in your life have you said yes to that turned out to be very different from what you expected?

How have Jesus and the Holy Spirit enabled you to drink the cup of your life?

What can Jesus' suffering teach us about facing our own sorrows? In what ways have you been transformed by suffering?

Jesus was tested in every way. Do you ever remember that when you are being tested?

*(Questions adapted from the study guide for Henri Nouwen's book, Can you Drink the Cup? Ave Maria Press, 2006)*

### **A Prayer for Humility**

Oh Father, give us the humility which  
Realizes its ignorance,  
Admits its mistakes,  
Recognizes its need,  
Welcomes advice,  
Accepts rebuke.  
Help us always to praise rather than criticize,  
To sympathize rather than to condemn.  
To encourage rather than to discourage,  
To build rather than to destroy,  
And to think of people at their best rather than at their worst.  
This we ask through Christ, our Lord, Amen. (William Barclay)

---

## *Focus on Justice*

The greatest service

Today's liturgy is about service. In the opening prayer we ask for "strength and joy in serving God as followers of Christ." The first reading is from the fourth servant song of Second Isaiah: the prophet sings of one who "gives his life as an offering." The Gospel is about disciples who want to be important. Jesus teaches them this lesson: "whoever wants to rank first among you must serve the needs of all."

In the prayer over the gifts, we ask for the "freedom to serve you with our lives." Our Lord and Master calls us to be a community of service. Our strength comes from following in the footsteps of this Master, who "has not come to be served but to serve."

What is our service to the world? If all we do is affirm the world's wisdom, what kind of service is that? After all, it is the wisdom of the world that has led us into the dark alleys of hatred, alienation, and killing. "It cannot be like that with you." We must provide an alternative to the wisdom of the world: that is the greatest service we can offer.

"The fundamental moral criterion for all economic decisions, policies, and institutions is this: They must be at the service of all people, especially the poor."

(U.S. Bishops, Economic Justice for All, 1986: 24)

"The process of development and liberation takes concrete shape in the exercise of solidarity, that is to say in the love and service of neighbor, especially of the poorest."

(Pope John Paul II, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, 1987: 46)

*From Gerald Darring (published on liturgy.slu – 2012)*

***For thought or discussion:***

How can we be of service to the world?

What does unselfish service look like in our parish, work or home?

On a larger scale, how could it change the world?

How do you think Jesus' idea of service is different from the world's idea of service?

Do we tend to act with the "savior mentality" when we want to help others, or do we act because we are responding to God's great love for us – to Jesus' example of unselfishness?