

*Our Lady of Lourdes*  
Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
October 18, 2009

**Readings:**

**Isaiah 53:10-11**

**Hebrews 4:14-16**

**Mark 10:35-45**

Over the past weeks in Mark's gospel we have seen Jesus and his disciples traveling to Jerusalem. At the beginning of the journey Jesus healed a blind man. After healing him he could see clearly yet his own disciples who have been with him throughout the journey were unable to see and understand what Jesus was telling them.

During the travel Jesus has predicted his suffering and death three times. After the first prediction Peter rebuked Jesus only to be rebuked in return. Jesus told the disciples "deny yourselves and take up their cross and follow me." (8:34) after the second prediction the disciples argued about who is the greatest and Jesus said to them "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." (9:35)

Just before the gospel today Jesus predicts his death a third time. "See we are going to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief Priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, then they will hand him over to the Gentiles: they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him: and after three days he will rise again." (Mark 10:33-34) Jesus tells his disciples "whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all." (10:44)

After the passage today Jesus will heal another blind man who followed Jesus. The stories of the two blind men are bookends around the stories of Jesus' disciples who can not see. So we come to today's story, James and John ask Jesus "to do for us whatever we want" I would bet that some of you who are parents have experienced something like this. A son or daughter comes to Mom and says, "Mom, I want to ask you a favor. Promise me you'll say yes?" Mom says, "Wait a minute dear I can't say yes until I know what you're asking me. So what is it?" her daughter says, "I'm afraid to tell you because I know you'll say no and I need you to say yes. So just say yes Ok?" What was Mom's answer? No.

James and John wanted to assure a prime spot in Jesus' kingdom. They just didn't get it. Perhaps we are saying to ourselves how could they be so dense, so uncaring. They want Jesus to fit into their plans rather than fitting their plans into Jesus'. If we take a minute to think about our prayers we might find some similarity to James and John's request. Are our prayers ones of adoration and praise, of thanksgiving or confession or sorrow? Or are most of our prayers those of asking for this or that. Our prayers may not be very different from James and John. At James and John's question Jesus tells them you do not know what you are asking. He asks them "are you able to drink the cup I will drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? They say yes not fully understanding what this meant. No one wants to suffer and surely God does not want us to suffer any more than he wanted Jesus to suffer. However suffering is sometimes a part of life.

There are some preachers today who proclaim what is referred to as the "Prosperity Gospel". Its appeal is to believe and you will grow rich. Its lesson is Jesus wants us to prosper, to go first class, to wear a Rolex and drive a Mercedes. There is nothing wrong in itself with

Rolexes and Mercedes and growing rich but it has nothing at all to do with the Gospel or believing or following Jesus. Jesus teaches us about cross bearing, service and sacrifice. He teaches us about a special joy that the world can not understand.

In the Mass, in the Eucharist we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus but we also celebrate his suffering and his death. They can not be separated. We can have no resurrection without the suffering. Christ's suffering has won the victory for us but his victory is not one where we are merely spectators. We join our suffering with Christ as we approach the altar and through the grace of God, through the Eucharist we experience the victory of Christ over all suffering. Jesus as he always does makes time to teach his disciples. He tells them "whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first among you must be slave." The Gospel of Jesus is a backwards way of living. It surely is contrary thinking. Michael Collins was the command module pilot on Apollo 11, the first flight to land men on the moon. In his book "Carrying the Fire" He talks about the difficulty of trying to rendezvous two spacecraft. He noted that some things that work on earth seem backwards in space. He noticed that objects flying in a low orbit fly faster than objects in a higher orbit.

The problem of a pilot trying to catch up to another spacecraft might seem simple enough. Increase speed until you catch up then slow down and rendezvous with the craft. Simple enough but in space it does not work. Adding thrust or speed in space will put it in a higher orbit which will slow it down. In order to catch up you actually have to decrease speed, move to a lower orbit and then at precisely the right moment move back to the higher orbit to rendezvous. Earthly logic does not work in space. Heavenly logic also is backwards often times to the logic of earth.

Jesus said the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve. There is a story about an incident that happened in the Revolutionary War. There were preparations being made for battle and a man dressed in civilian clothes passed a Corporal who was screaming orders at his men. Seeing that the men were exhausted by their labors the man asked the Corporal why don't you help them? The Corporal bristled and said "I am a Corporal." With a quick apology the man took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves and helped the men. When finished he said to the Corporal the next time you need help please feel free to call on your Commander in Chief, I will be glad to help. With that George Washington put on his hat and coat. President Washington understood today's Gospel.

Ironically, the men who will occupy the positions at Jesus' right and left are the two thieves on Golgotha. Following Jesus is not about status or possessions it is about service and sacrifice. Jesus asks each of us in this Church are you able to drink the cup I drink and to be baptized in the baptism I am baptized in?