

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time B

Jesus found himself today in a teachable moment. It is an unplanned opportunity that arises where someone has a chance to offer one's insight to his or her students. A teachable moment is not something that you can plan for; rather, it is a fleeting opportunity that must be sensed and seized by the person.

The lesson that Jesus wanted to impart to his disciples is the nature of true success. When Jesus and his apostles were sitting down to relax in Capernaum after a long day of walking in the hot, dusty roads of Galilee, he asked his disciples – “what are you arguing along the way? Jesus knows exactly what they have been talking about - success, glory, greatness – “Who is the greatest among them?”

But the apostles are too embarrassed to admit it; they suspect that their interest in worldly success is a too self-centered to be commendable. But our Lord's response is surprising. He doesn't tell them that they shouldn't desire to excel, to achieve or to do great things. He doesn't condemn that very normal human impulse. He knows that achieving things, making a difference in the world, is a basic need felt by every human heart. This is one of the purposes of our lives: being a sign of God's goodness by making a positive difference in the world we live in.

So Jesus doesn't scold them for wanting to do something great. Instead, he tells them what true greatness really is. The great task for every Christian is not to achieve fame and fortune, popularity, power, and worldly success. Rather, it is the same task that Christ himself undertook: to serve others, to make others happy, to reach out to those who are weak and in need, like little children. Greatness in Christ's Kingdom is equated with humility, an attitude of the heart that puts the good of others ahead of our own preferences: it's self-giving, not self-getting. He doesn't say to his apostles, "Don't strive to achieve great things," but he does point out where true, lasting, fulfilling greatness lies - in loving one's neighbor as Christ has loved them.

In Session 1 of the series “Who am I judged?” - The speaker asked his audience to imagine that it's the end of their life and people are there at their funeral to talk about them – “What would you like them to say about you?” People generally wanted to be remembered for the good qualities and virtues they exhibited in their life like kindness, generosity, honesty or loyalty – “he was a very kind person.”

Others wanted to hear them say about the relationships that are important to them such as being a good husband, wife or parent – “she was a great mother.” It is seldom for people to desire others to talk about how rich or powerful or famous they are. This actually tells us what is true success and greatness often means for us. We don’t want people to talk about us with regard to our achievements or popularity but about our relationships and qualities that have touched people especially our loved ones and the people around us whether at home, at work or in our greater community.

Most of us are able to see the beauty of humble service to others and we can understand intuitively why this is the mark of True Success in our lives. But putting this idea into practice is not so easy. We are willing to commit "random acts of kindness" now and then, because they make us feel good. But real progress towards spiritual maturity requires a deeper commitment. The best place to implement this plan for True Success is at home. It is in our closest relationships, those of our family, that our natural selfishness tends to come out most easily. And so, to transform those tendencies, to purify them and grow in the virtue of humility, we need to hone and sharpen them there. Humbly serving our spouse, our siblings, our parents - this is true Christ-like virtue; this is where we forge a Christ-like heart. Our family members know us well; they are familiar with our tantrums and egocentric habits. As a result, they aren't usually impressed by an extra act of kindness, service, or self-control, by an extra effort to be patient or to hold our tongue. I remember that I usually get a little worried when my siblings are extra caring or sweet to me because I know they are going to ask something from me. Who has the same feeling like me on that situation? Kidding aside, we do know our family members. That's why the home is the best place to grow in humility and pursue True Success. Serving others when there is no reward or recognition involved is the best way to follow Christ's example. If we gradually learn to think about others before ourselves inside the four walls of our home, it will become a second nature for us to do those outside those four walls. As Jesus renews his commitment to us in this Mass, let's renew our commitment to him, and ask him to help us, starting today, to pursue greatness in the eyes of God. Amen.