

Reflection for the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

As one hears the Gospel reading this Sunday, taken from the Gospel of Mark, it would not be surprising if the person hearing the Gospel reading found a connection with Christ's third prediction of His passion that is the Gospel reading for Wednesday of the 8th Week of Ordinary Time, May 26th of this year. The Gospel reading for this Wednesday of ordinary time is Mark 10: 32-45 and the Gospel reading this Sunday is Mark 10:35-45. There is a shorter form for today's Gospel reading that is Mark 10:35-42. Both the short and long forms of today's Gospel reading do not include verses 32 thru 34. It is these three verses found in the Gospel reading for Wednesday of the 8th Week of Ordinary Time that has Christ's third prediction of His passion. Because our Gospel reading this Sunday does not include Christ's third prediction of His passion, this Gospel reading is often referred to as the "*Ambition of James and John.*" Because of the way the other Apostles react to the request of James and John, this ambition is often seen in a negative light.

It might be helpful to note that ambition can be defined as; *a strong desire to do or to achieve something, typically requiring determination and hard work.* This definition of the word ambition can be seen in a positive light. Of course, if the ambition is what is called "*blind ambition*" with no moral compass and the desire to achieve the goal can be used to justify whatever it takes to achieve the goal then this type of ambition is not healthy for oneself or others.

Because our Gospel reading this Sunday does not include verses 32,33 and 34 of chapter 10 of the Gospel of Mark, the reading naturally becomes completely focused on the part of the Gospel that is titled "*Ambition of James and John.*" In these 10 verses of the Gospel of Mark, we hear of James and John requesting a favor, which is when Jesus arrives at His glory, they would like to sit one on His left and the other on His right. These are two of His closest followers along with Peter, so in many ways it would be natural that they would be close to Him when He achieves His glory. The other ten Apostles became indignant when they heard of the request that James and John had made to Jesus. At this point Jesus takes the opportunity to have a teachable moment and points out that He is looking for followers that are willing to be servant leaders. To be a leader as a follower of Christ requires the leader to be a servant of all. Over the last two thousand years of our Catholic Faith, we can find true leaders of the Catholic Church and they were truly servant leaders, they lead by example and place the Church's needs ahead of their own.

One can ask the question, was James and John by requesting to sit on Jesus' right and left side, placing their needs and desires ahead of others, or were they just wishing to be close to Jesus. This question is answered by the response of James and John when Jesus asks them "*Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized.*" James and John indicate that to be with Jesus they are ready to suffer hardship. This answer by James and John does not sound like an answer that would be given by someone that is just trying to get ahead in life, rather this answer sounds like it is coming from two people that truly believe in Jesus and what He stands for. The difficulty that the other Apostles might have with James and John is that by asking to sit on Jesus' left and right side they separate themselves from the rest of the Apostles, they in a sense were choosing to leave the community of the 12.

Once the other Apostles become indignant with James and John, due to their request, Jesus calls the 12 together and He states, "*whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave to 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.*" Jesus is not just speaking to James and John but rather, He is speaking to all His Apostles and reminding them what their focus should be. They are all called to be servant leaders, He is reminding them that their focus should be on being of service and not seeing oneself as better than others due to someone else's actions or statement. The 10 Apostles could have been reacting to James and John appearing to leave the 12, but Jesus reminds them that their focus must be on what Christ is calling them all to be, Servant Leaders.