

O. T. XXIX SUNDAY: ISAIAH 53: 10-11; HEBREWS 4: 14-16; MARK 10: 35-45 (Octo.18th)

Muhammad Ali, the boxer used to call himself "the greatest!" There was something comical about his arrogance. Once he declared: "I float like a butterfly, I sting like a bee." The story is told of him that once when he was on an airplane about to take off, the flight steward said, "Sir, would you please fasten your seat belt?" Muhammad Ali replied, "Superman doesn't need a seat belt." The steward replied, "In that case, Superman doesn't need an airplane to fly." Today's gospel tells us of two of Jesus' disciples who wanted to be supermen—to sit at the right hand and the left hand of Jesus in his messianic kingdom-- to be the greatest, to be the first.

For the third time, (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:32), Jesus predicts his own death. In spite of Jesus' two previous predictions, James and John still thought of him as a revolutionary freedom fighter and shared the Jewish belief that the Messiah would be a political king, sitting on David's throne and ruling over a re-united Israel. They were sure that the purpose of Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem was to overthrow the Roman rulers. Hence they wanted an assurance from Jesus that he would make them his first- and second-in-command in his messianic kingdom.

The request of James and John revealed their lack of understanding of true leadership. They were looking for positions of power and prestige. Jesus gave them a sharp rebuke when he said, "*You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?*" In Scripture "cup" and "baptism" are sometimes images of suffering. To drink the cup is to accept the reality of suffering and to do God's will in the midst of it, as Jesus did in Gethsemane. Those who follow the way of Jesus and seek to imitate his example of servant leadership must be willing even to suffer for others. Jesus insisted that his disciples must drink from his cup if they expected to reign with him in his kingdom. The cup he had in mind was a bitter one, involving crucifixion. Baptism was also linked to the divine judgment that will come as a result of human sinfulness. Jesus had in mind the cup of his own sacrificial death and the baptism of fire which lay before him in Jerusalem.

Without fully understanding what Jesus meant, James and John quickly affirmed that they could share in their master's *cup* and *baptism*. They had no understanding of the personal cost that lay behind these two images. Naturally, the request of James and John angered the other disciples. They were upset that James and John had tried to gain some advantage over them. So Jesus called them all together to give them yet another lecture on real leadership in the kingdom of God.

He summarized his 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.*" Jesus also explained that he was going to accomplish his mission by undergoing crucifixion, offering himself as a sacrifice to save people from their sins. Here, he challenged his apostles to share not

only his power, but his service, by sacrificing themselves for others as he had done. According to Jesus, greatness consists not in what we have, nor in what we can get from others but in what we give to others. For Jesus, Service is sacrifice: extending a helping hand toward those in need translates love into meaningful deeds.

Whatever may be our place in society -- whether important or unimportant -- we can serve. We should learn to serve with a smile. This is possible whether we are in military service, social service, law, medical service, government or business. If we want to be leaders, we must learn to be available, accountable, and vulnerable. This triad --- availability, accountability, and vulnerability --- qualifies us for what Robert Greenleaf has called "*Servant Leadership*." "Life becomes harder for us when we live for others, but it also becomes richer and happier." – Albert Schweitzer.

Beautiful prayer by Mother Theresa, "Lord Jesus, set me free from fear and pride that I may be a servant of love and compassion for others. May the fire of your love inflame my heart that I may give generously and serve joyfully for your sake."