

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 17 October 2021

Scriptures: Isaiah 53:10-11; Hebrews 4:14-16; Mark 10:35-45

Homily: Fr. Ken

Today's scripture readings show us that true greatness lies in generously serving people in need. Those who focus on promoting themselves in the eyes of the world, do not receive prominence in the eyes of God.

In the first reading from the prophet Isaiah, we see that those who suffer on behalf of others do not do so in vain, even if they suffered in the process. God will reach out through their pain and touch the hearts of many people.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, we see that through Jesus's life on earth, he knows exactly how difficult it can be to overcome our weaknesses. We can, therefore, be confident of his mercy.

In the Gospel story from Mark, James and John looked for preferential treatment. Jesus, however, told them that greatness is achieved through service, not through self-promotion. The two had approached Jesus seeking to be given prominent places in the Kingdom of God. Jesus told them that heaven is not like an earthly kingdom in which there are places of greater and lesser importance, where a person's value lies in power and material possessions. If James and John wanted to be close to Jesus, they must also follow him through his suffering.

Jesus was not among people as a king to be served: his mission was one of service, even at the cost of his life. Jesus' life and death were, above all, missions of total self-giving in love. The entire message of discipleship, as far as Jesus was concerned, was that real freedom lies in giving until there is nothing else to give.

Through periods of suffering, people learn that there are things that money, power, and influence can never buy. The Beatles sang, "Money can't buy me love", but neither can love be demanded or imposed. Love is a completely free gift. If it comes with conditions, it is not true love. Love is the one thing in life that grows by being shared.

Anyone who really loves someone is prepared to suffer with and on behalf of that person. The pain may be hard, but it is not meaningless. Parents who care for a sick child know that however much it hurts to see their child's illness, the little one is too precious to abandon in its hour of need. They willingly accept their pain if only they can offer their child the loving support the child needs. Jesus, who shares with us in our joys and our sorrows, our weaknesses and temptations, was willing to give his whole life for us, purely out of love. He called James and John to follow him through suffering the joyful pain of loving. And it is through the same love of Christ that Catholic martyrs, past and present, and so many others, who have borne witness to Christ through the ages, could also love until they had nothing left to give—except their very lives.

-end-