

HOMILY SUNDAY 25-B (Homily 02)

“Freedom To Serve”

(Wisdom 2:12, 17-20; Psalm 54; James 3:16 – 4:3; Mk 9:30-37)

“Clericalism is about power; Priesthood is about service. “

That statement which appeared recently in a religious magazine sounds very similar to the words of Jesus in today’s gospel: “Whoever wants to be first must be the last and servant of all”

As we continue to celebrate the Year of the Priest, we are reminded by today’s readings that ministerial priesthood, and our priesthood of the baptized, is all about being free to serve and to stand up for the truth.

In the first reading today, the prophet Isaiah describes a “righteous one” who was willing to suffer insult and even torture for the sake of truth, for the sake of what was right.

I think of a university student in Saskatoon who remained silent when a fellow student unfairly criticized the Church in a class and how angry he was at himself for his lack of courage to speak up for truth. On the other hand, I think of a friend who had the courage to tell his brother they were leaving a stag party when a stripper was brought in to entertain the gathering. That was a courageous and righteous act and I was proud my friend for his courage to speak up and act.

In today’s Gospel, we see Jesus, the righteous one and the suffering servant of Isaiah, in action. In this account, he is preparing his disciples for the Cross. They, however, are still immersed in the way of the world, the desire for power, prestige and possessions. Jesus is compelled to use a child as a symbol of powerlessness, innocence and transparency. Jesus presents this child as a model of what his followers should be like, indeed must be like. Only a child would have the innocence to tell a salesman at the door “my mom told me to tell you that she wasn’t home.” Such is the innocence of a child that speaks somewhat to the transparency asked of a disciple of Jesus.

The second reading from James then takes us even deeper into this right relationship with God, describing what such a person is like, what such a person says and does. This person possesses wisdom and purity of heart. This person is peaceful, gentle, willing to let go and not stubborn. This person has done some inner soul work, dealing with his or her demons. They have become aware of their defects of character, admitted them, named them, shared them with others, and prayed for God to heal them of these shortcomings. Their prayer is no longer for things or possessions or pleasures, but for the gifts of the Spirit and for inner healing. They are merciful and able to forgive. Above all, they seek to serve, not to dominate or control. They know who they are and they are at peace.

In Washington, D.C., there is a church called the Servant Church. They offer courses on servant leadership. It is a storefront church that seeks only to serve the poor and the

needy. A prominent Catholic who has collaborated with them and spent time there was spiritual writer Henri Nouwen, who himself always sought to serve just causes any way that he could.

Jean Vanier is another person who understands this fine balance of righteousness and service that the readings are inviting us into today. In his book *Becoming Human*, he speaks of servant leadership and righteousness in terms of human freedom:

It is the truthful acceptance of self, and the desire to live in truth, in justice and in love, that is the basis of freedom. We are freed when we begin to put justice, heartfelt relationships and the service of others and of truth over and above our own needs for love and success or our fears of failure and of relationships.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is above all a call to mission, to service. The radical symbolic washing of the disciples' feet at the Last Supper was a stark reminder to us by Jesus that to be in communion with him as a disciple is to give one's life away in the service of others and of truth.

So let us remember, in this special Year of the Priest, that the ministerial priesthood, and our priesthood of the baptized, is all about being free to serve and to stand up for the truth.