

‘THE SON OF MAN CAME NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE.’

THIS PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE IS A FAVORITE OF BISHOPS WHENEVER THEY SPEAK TO DEACONS OR ABOUT THEM. THE MESSAGE IS ALWAYS THE SAME; THAT WE ARE CALLED TO SERVE GOD’S PEOPLE IN THE IMAGE OF CHRIST THE SERVANT. BUT IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT ALL OF GOD’S PEOPLE ARE CALLED TO SERVE USING THEIR GIFTS WHEREEVER THEY MAY BE. THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MISSIONARY. YOU MAY NOT HAVE HEARD THAT THIS TERM EVEN APPLIES TO EACH OF OUR POPES. ONE OF THE MANY TITLES OF THE POPE IS ‘SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD’.

THE PROPHET, ISAIAH WROTE 4 SONGS ABOUT THE ‘SUFFERING SERVANT’. TODAY’S FIRST READING IS PART OF ONE OF THEM. THIS SERVANT IS CALLED BY GOD TO BEAR THE SINS OF ALL PEOPLE. FOR US AS CHRISTIANS, ISAIAH FORESAW THE COMING OF JESUS CHRIST. THE SUFFERING SERVANT TRUSTS IN GOD AND GIVES HIS LIFE, BUT IN RETURN HE SEES THE LIGHT OF GOD. HE WILL JUSTIFY MANY...HE WILL MAKE OUR PEACE WITH GOD. HE WILL BEAR OUR GUILT AND WE, IN OUR TURN, WILL BE SAVED. THE SERVANT WILL ALSO SEE THE WILL OF GOD BEING DONE THROUGH HIS OR HER ACTIONS.

TODAY'S PASSAGE FROM THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS REMINDS US THAT JESUS IS OUR HIGH PRIEST BESIDES BEING A HUMAN BEING WHO KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT WE ARE GOING THROUGH. HE KNOWS OUR PAINS AND SUFFERINGS. HE HAS COMPASSION BECAUSE HE HAS EXPERIENCED OUR HUMANITY. THEREFORE, WE ARE ABLE TO APPROACH HIM AS OUR LORD, IN PRAYER AND THROUGH THE EUCHARIST BECAUSE WE CAN TRUST IN HIM.

THE APOSTLES, JAMES AND JOHN, ASKED TO SIT AT THE RIGHT AND LEFT SIDE OF JESUS IN HIS KINGDOM. THEY MISUNDERSTOOD WHAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS ALL ABOUT. THEY WERE STILL THINKING OF EARTHLY KINGDOMS. THEY WERE STUCK ALSO IN THE ALL TOO HUMAN TRAP OF COMPARING THEMSELVES WITH OTHERS. PERHAPS BECAUSE THEY HAD BEEN CLOSE TO JESUS FROM THE BEGINNING OF HIS EARTHLY MINISTRY THEY WERE EXPECTING TO BE GIVEN HIGH PLACES OF AUTHORITY. OF COURSE, THIS CAUSED PROBLEMS WITH THE OTHER DISCIPLES AND JESUS HAD TO GIVE THEM ALL A CLEARER UNDERSTANDING OF THE MEANING OF THE KINGDOM. HE FIRST ASKED THEM IF THEY CAN ENDURE THE PAIN AND SUFFERING OF BEING A FOLLOWER OF HIS. HE TEACHES THEM THAT IF THEY ARE GOING TO BE LEADERS FOR OTHERS AND SHOW THEM THE WAY TO HOLINESS, THEY WILL ENDURE RIDICULE AND CRITICISM. THEY WILL BE PUNISHED FOR

PREACHING THE GOSPEL. THEY MAY SUFFER AND DIE. WHILE JAMES AND JOHN SAY THEY CAN DO THIS, IT STILL SEEMS THEY DO NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND.

THEN JESUS INSTRUCTS HIS FOLLOWERS THAT THEY ARE TO BE SERVANTS IN GOD'S KINGDOM. IF THEY WISH TO BE LEADERS, THEY MUST SERVE OTHERS. THEY WILL HAVE TO PUT ASIDE THEIR OWN DESIRES EVEN THEIR OWN COMFORT IN ORDER TO ASSIST OTHERS. THEY MUST LEAD BY SERVING.

MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA IS A MODEL FOR US ALL. ONE OF MANY STORIES ABOUT HER COMES FROM AN AMERICAN PRIEST. HE DESCRIBES HOW ONE DAY, SOON AFTER HE ARRIVED TO WORK IN A HOSPITAL, A YOUNG SISTER WAS TRYING TO WASH A TEN YEAR OLD GIRL. THE POOR CHILD WAS COVERED WITH SORES. SHE WAS STANDING IN A TUB IN A CORNER, HURTING AND ANGRY. SHE KEPT HITTING THE YOUNG SISTER, SPLASHING WATER AT HER AND SCREAMING. IT SEEMED RATHER USELESS TO TRY TO CLEAN THE CHILD. JUST THEN MOTHER TERESA ENTERED. SHE HAD HEARD THE COMMOTION. "NOW WE'LL SEE HOW HOLY THE BOSS REALLY IS," THE OBSERVER THOUGHT. MOTHER TERESA WALKED OVER TO WHERE THE CHILD WAS AND DISMISSED THE YOUNG SISTER. THE CHILD LOOKED AT HER AND SCREAMED AND THEN SOAKED HER WITH THE BATH WATER. SHE JUST STOPPED AND LOOKED AT THE CHILD. SHE WAITED A LITTLE BIT AND THEN

SLOWLY MOVED CLOSER AND CLOSER TO THE CHILD. THEN SHE REACHED OUT HER ARMS AND HUGGED THE LITTLE GIRL. THE CHILD CRIED AND CRIED. MOTHER TERESA KEPT HOLDING HER. AFTER A LONG TIME, THE CHILD STOPPED CRYING. MOTHER TERESA THEN BEGAN TO WASH THE LITTLE GIRL, CLEANING HER SORES, THE WHOLE TIME SINGING TO HER. THAT SMALL, GENTLE WOMAN HAD AUTHORITY AND SHE HAD HUMILITY. SHE CONTINUALLY ENCOUNTERED CHRIST WITHIN OTHERS AS SHE HAD WITHIN HERSELF THROUGH A LIFE OF PRAYER. THE LIFE OF CHRIST WITHIN US IS A POWER THAT CAN TRANSFORM THE WORLD. IT IS A POWER THAT CAN MOST CERTAINLY, TRANSFORM EACH OF US.

THIS WEEK WE CELEBRATE MISSION SUNDAY. WE REMEMBER AND SUPPORT THOSE WHO ARE SERVING TO SPREAD THE FAITH. THEY ARE CALLED UPON TO LIVE THE SACRIFICIAL LOVE OF THE LORD. WOMEN AND MEN SERVING IN MISSIONS KNOW WHAT SUFFERING IS. THEY SEE THE FACE FAMINE AND DISEASE AND POLITICAL REPRESSION – MANY OF THEM DAILY. THOSE MEN AND WOMEN EXPERIENCE A CLOSE IDENTIFICATION WITH JESUS, THE SUFFERING SERVANT. YOU AND I ALSO CAN LIVE OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH AS MISSIONARIES TOO, RIGHT WHERE WE ARE, BY SERVING OTHERS AND BY TRUSTING IN GOD’S PROVIDENCE TO GUIDE US IN ALL THAT WE DO.

A Vietnamese Folk Tale

In Hell people have chopsticks a meter long so they cannot reach their mouths; and so are forever suffering a hunger that will never be satisfied. Whereas, in heaven though the chopsticks are also a meter long however, everyone is always well fed. The reason for this is simple. In heaven, the people feed one another.

*In the morning let me know your love for I put my trust in you.
Make me know the way I should walk; to you I lift up my soul.*

Psalm 143