

Twenty Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

What are we looking for in someone called to be a leader in our society? What do we need to be a good leader ourselves?

Today's gospel helps us to focus in on Jesus and the kind of leader he is for his disciples. We listen well as Jesus tries to teach his disciples about leadership. Our gospel continues that journey south towards Jerusalem that Jesus began with his disciples in last week's gospel. This is the end of Jesus public ministry in Galilee. Now it is time for the twelve to learn what it would mean to be his disciples and what is demanded of them if they were to lead people of faith in his name. Jesus speaks again about the passion and death that he would have to undergo. Jesus talks about being handed over to those who would put him to death. This expression "to be handed over" becomes shorthand for his suffering and death. Little did his closest friends suspect that the one who would hand him over to his enemies was one of their number. Mark tells us that his disciples did not understand what he had said. They showed their lack of understanding by arguing about who was the greatest among them. It just seems so out of place when Jesus has told them again about his passion and death.

There is silence, a guilty silence, when Jesus asks them about their conversation. Jesus sits down, taking the pose

of a teacher, and tells them that anyone who wants to be first must make himself last and servant of all. And then he puts his arms around a child. The gesture itself would have been most surprising. Children were loved and valued in their own families, but in the public space they had no status at all. They were ignored. Nobody took any notice of who they were or what they said. Jesus turns things upside down by giving them an importance that nobody else did. To treat them as equals was just unheard of. A person would have to become a child themselves to treat a child with equality. Jesus then goes on to identify himself and his Father with a child. "Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

What Jesus is saying here transforms the way that most people thought about God. The God, who looks upon us from a distance, is not the God that Jesus had come to reveal. The God who must be always feared and served without any questions asked, is not the God that Jesus had come to reveal. It is the God who puts his arms around us to embrace us and make us welcome that Jesus wants us to know. It is the God who loves us in our littleness that Jesus wants us to understand. Jesus invites us into relationship with a God who comes among us as one who serves.

When we begin to understand that about God then we begin to understand something central about ourselves and those with whom we live. Our importance does not come from what we do or who we know. Our value does not come from what people say about us. God sees us all in the same way. Every human life is precious in the sight of God. The Father loves us all with the same love with which he loves his beloved Son Jesus. This is something that gives us hope. This is something that we can hold onto no matter what else is happening in our lives.

We will believe it more easily if we have grown up in a family where we were valued, no matter how well we performed. We teach our children and our grandchildren about how God loves them by the unconditional love that we have for them. We teach our children and grandchildren how God sees them and accepts them and forgives them by the way that we do that ourselves. Every family is called to be a sacrament of God.

This weekend throughout the Archdiocese we are remembering married people who have or will celebrate significant anniversaries of their marriage this year. Archbishop O'Regan has asked us to do this to acknowledge the love and the commitment that is being lived out in family life every day. Pope Francis has often spoken about family life. Three years ago, when he was

in Dublin for the Festival of Families he said, "The Gospel of the family is truly joy for the world, since there, in our families, Jesus can always be found, dwelling in simplicity and poverty as he did in the home of the Holy Family of Nazareth. All of us are called to find, in the family, our fulfilment in love. God's grace helps us daily to live as one in mind and heart." I think he was aware of how much the Irish love to drink tea. He went on to say, "It is like making tea: it is easy to bring the water to boil, but a good cup of tea takes time and patience; it needs to brew! So it is that each day Jesus warms us with his love and lets it penetrate our whole being. From the treasury of his Sacred Heart, he offers us the grace we need to heal our infirmities and to open our minds and hearts to hear, understand and forgive one another."

In today's Mass we thank all of you who are married for the witness that you are of God's love for us. We can confidently say that as we live out this love, it is within our families that we learn how to be leaders. It is there that God teaches us how to respect one another. He teaches us how to value every human life. God teaches us how we can give leadership in our world by putting ourselves at the service of those who need us most.