

Homily 29th Sunday, Year B: Isaiah 53:10-11; Hebrew 4:14-16; Mk 10:42-45

Introduction: Mission Sunday offers us the opportunity to renew our commitment to service, mission and ministry

I can imagine that just like me, some of us here, soccer fans, are glued to the premiership and other soccer events. I love Soccer and my English team is Chelsea but guess what, due to their poor performance this year, I have decided many times that I would become a part time fan until they change their ways. I said to Chelsea, my heart is made of steel, you won't break it. Last year, I enjoyed watching Chelsea because of the fun and the excitement of winning. It feels good to celebrate achievement. However it is good to also know that life is not all about winning. Just taking part is all that matters; and we should all get gold stars just for being and for trying, I like to think.

Actually, our world of today is rather more comfortable with ambition, and achievement, and self-promotion. You are number one; Nobody loves a loser; nice guys finish last—these echo deep values of our contemporary world. There are no gold medals and adulation for those who come last. It's that sort of mindset that see in the disciples in this Sunday's Gospel. Jesus is on his final journey to Jerusalem and says that there he will suffer and die. Far from expressing sorrow or sympathy, James and John skip the thought of suffering and move to the thought of resurrection and ask Jesus to let them sit at his right and left when he enters his glory. They want to be more important than anyone else. They want position, and power, and status. They want to win! Jesus answers that they may get what they ask for, but they certainly will follow his way of suffering. But then the other 10 disciples also miss the point and start shouting at James and John for they too want some share in power. Earlier in the Gospel of Mark when Jesus predicted that he would suffer their reaction was to argue about who would be the greatest, who would be first.

Jesus then gives them a lesson on what power should be among those who follow him – those who followed him then, and those who choose to be his disciples today. Gentile rulers lord it over their subjects, and their great ones throw their weight around. Throughout the Gospel of Mark Jesus describes the way things work in the world – in a world that lives apart from the message he proclaims: what people want for themselves: self-centeredness; saving one's own life; acquiring the world; being great; lording it over others; being anxious about wealth. But Jesus rejects this way in a ringing statement: "this must not happen among you."

The message is clear, there is no short cut for God's favor. Jesus' image of authority is the one who is a servant. The primacy is that of service. As someone who fled when people wanted to make him a king by force, Jesus is highly suspicious of those who need to arrange their own enthronement. Jesus wants us to serve and not to be served. The apostles were furious when they learnt of what the brothers wanted to do. We should be careful about what we wish for as this can sometimes hurt other people. By living a sacramental life in the church, we become conformed to Christ and grow in his love. Like James and John we sometimes fail to request for the right things. In the sacraments we are renewed and made to love the things of heaven and made to judge wisely the things of earth.

In simple terms the Gospel calls on us, you and I, contemporary followers of Jesus, to reject a life-path that leads to power and dominance of others – be that in the Church, or in business, or in college, or in our everyday relationships and personal encounters. So often it is among ordinary Christians that we see the example of Jesus lived out. This liberating service shines forth in parents

at the bed of a sick child, in a spouse caring for another with Alzheimer's disease; in a person like St Marianne Cope who spent her life caring for the lepers of Hawaii; in a person like Sr. Dorothy Stang, a Notre Dame sister who was murdered in Brazil in 2005 for protesting the exploitation of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon. And whose last words as she was shot in the head were "Blessed are the poor in spirit".

We do not have to look to Hawaii or Brazil to find examples of liberating service. Here in St. John's Parish, there is the coffee serving group, the food bank group; there is the Knights of St. Columba; the building committee, the Church cleaning group, the bazaar committee, the social committee who organise our music events (the International Music event and the strictly st. Johns); the padre pio prayer group, the legion of Mary, the flower decoration group and so many organizations who serve us in this Church. Which of these service group do you belong to dear friends? I am already dreaming of how to get our Church hall working again? Who will help us when the time comes to face that hard fight? Opportunities of service, real Christian service, liberating and life-giving service, are never far from us – they exist in the Church and outside, among strangers and friends, even in our own families and communities.

Today is Mission Sunday, and such service is at the very heart of the Church's Mission – it IS the Church's mission. Our mission is not to be served, but to serve, and to give our lives.

Of course, we are to think and to pray specifically today about the Church's mission of spreading the Gospel, the Good News of our Redemption in Christ. That Gospel can only effectively spread and take root in the hearts and minds of those who do not yet know Jesus if those charged with preaching it – that's you and me – live lives of service, really give of ourselves, really show our beliefs in the way we act and the way we love. To be first, we must get involved in any of these services. Jesus tells us that the one who loses gives his/her all serving will find true life – true, real, abundant, amazing, grace-filled life, in community with others and in union with Christ.