

September 23, 2018

25th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Whenever we read the scriptures, and most especially the gospels, it is important to pay attention to the details. There are details from the 9th chapter of Mark that are important to help us to understand what is going on. There is an important detail in that, “Jesus and his disciples left from there and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it.” He is going through Galilee because his ministry is finished there, Jesus is teaching his disciples that his real mission will not be so much on performing miracles, his preaching and teaching, the focus now is his journey to the cross. He does not want anyone to know because he needs to focus on the 12 disciples, to do all he can to prepare them for his suffering and death. These small details are important to understand the shift of direction for Jesus and his mission to suffer, die and rise again so that we could live. He is more than a prophet, more than a miracle worker, he is our Savior, and he saved us by taking on not only our flesh, but by taking on our sin, though he himself did not sin, so that the sin of the world could be put to death on the cross.

Another detail, when Jesus tells them for the second time that he must suffer and die, the text tells us that “they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him.” Why were they afraid? Certainly they weren’t afraid of Jesus who showed them real friendship, who told them again and again not to be afraid. They were afraid of what Jesus teaching would demand of them. They were afraid of the depth of conversion it would demand of them if they were to follow him. We can see just how far from their minds and hearts was the model of the humble, suffering servant of Jesus when he catches them arguing among themselves who is the greatest. It would seem that they were not only afraid, they really did not want to give up their former way of life. They didn’t want to accept the cross, to live not for themselves, but for Christ. Maybe they knew that if they knew deep down that if they followed Jesus who gave his life, they might have to do the same. In the end, all of them did, except the Apostle John. John remained at the cross with his mother, the others fled.

What does it mean for us to give our lives to Christ, the one who sacrificed his life so that we could live? In one way or another, it means living lives that are sacrificial, lives that are for Christ, not for ourselves. For most of us that means

looking carefully at our motivation to give our lives in service or even to donate money. There are a lot of people who give hours in service and who are generous in donating money but who never set foot in a Church. Some people could very well say, "People who don't believe do just as much good if not more." If we get caught up in that, aren't we caught in the very kind of comparisons that the disciples were arguing about, who is the greatest among us?" Our motivation for doing the very same good is completely different. Our motivation is to give glory to Jesus who suffered and died for us. We need to also constantly examine that motivation. Most people when asked why they give their time, talent and treasure, they we say like this: "I do it because it makes me feel good." Is our motivation at that level or is it deeper? The cross of Christ did not feel good, that is our motivation.

Here is another detail, Jesus sits down, that means he is going to teach something important. The he brings a little child in their midst and says, whoever welcome a child such as this welcomes me, and the one who welcomes me welcomes not me, but the one who sent me. Children in Jesus time were not considered to be full persons until adolescence. Why? Many children didn't survive to adolescence. It was a way for families and the community to absorb the loss of so many children. This is yet another example of Jesus teaching that when your care for the forgotten, the one who is considered "lesser than" you care for me.

Here is a quote from St. Mother Teresa: "I have found a wonderful paradox, that if you love until it hurts, there won't be more hurt, only more love." Our focus needs to be always on Christ and his cross because it is there that we find the love God. That is a detail we should never forget.