

21st October 2018 (29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Isaiah 53:10-11; Psalm 32(33):4-5,18-20,22; Hebrews 4:14-16; Mark 10:35-45.

The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve.

Who is Jesus? What is the role of the Messiah – Christ? How are we invited to follow Jesus? I think these are among the questions today's gospel passage is trying to respond to.

In this part of the gospel according to Mark, Jesus is heading towards Jerusalem, where we know he will be arrested, suffer his passion and death, and then rise again. Jesus has tried twice before to tell his disciples about what was waiting for him in Jerusalem. Now he tells them again, a third time, but one wonders whether the disciples had actually heard anything at all.

Immediately after telling the disciples about his passion and death, James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, come forward with a request: they want to be assigned the two most important positions in his cabinet! Jesus' answer shows how inappropriate the request was. Firstly the role of assigning positions in the kingdom does not belong to him, but to the Father; the disciples seem to have still been thinking in terms of a kingdom with land and armies, like other kings had. Secondly the disciples had first to participate in the same 'cup' and 'baptism' as Jesus. The 'cup' is a biblical reference to God's will, and the 'baptism' a reference to being immersed in the troubled waters of life, including passion and death.

Jesus then passes on to explain to his disciples his concept of leadership and the type of leadership that should be employed among those who follow him. He has not come to be served, but to serve – as we can witness in the washing of the feet in John's gospel. He is also ready to die on the cross in order to take upon himself all our sins. Earthly kings sit on golden thrones and expect to be shown respect and servitude. On the contrary, the Son of Man is the one who serves and gives his life for the salvation of the multitude.

Where do I stand today? How often do I meditate the word of God and the life of Christ? Do I understand what it really means to be a Christian?

Being a Christian does not give me any extra privileges in front of God, but rather more obligations. I have been called and have been given the gift of faith; I am invited to get to know God more deeply and model my life on the life of Jesus.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prays that if it were at all possible, the 'cup' of his passion and death be taken away from him; but then he prays that not his will, but God's be done. As part of my life journey I too need to constantly attune myself to God's will in my life. What is it God is calling me to? How do I live my life as a Christian and witness to the Good News proclaimed by Jesus?

Living as a Christian is not an easy way of life. Very often I find myself swimming against the tide because I try to live as a Christian. Am I ready to be 'baptised' in this upstream struggle and continue living my Christian calling? Some have had to give up their life because of their beliefs. What am I ready to give up because of my faith in Christ? If my friends, work or way of life took me away from my faith, would I be ready to give it all away for the sake of Christ?

Jesus invites me to be of service of others. He invites me to reach out and give of my time and talents to those who are in need around me. How ready am I to serve others? What does this actually mean in my life? Jesus washes the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper; am I ready to kneel and wash the feet of those who require my help?

What does it mean for me to follow Christ? It is not a way to look for honours or acknowledgement, but a way to serve.

Fr Mario