

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Have you wondered what motivates people to serve? Mother Teresa spent her entire life in service to the poor, the abandoned, and the dying. Fr. Damian of Molokai spent most of his life serving lepers. A few years ago when a ship was seized by the pirates off the coast of Somalia, the captain offered himself as a hostage so that his crew might be set free. CS Lewis was devastated when his wife, who was much younger than him, contracted cancer and was stricken with unbearable pain. He prayed that he be allowed to take her pain. What would have inspired such a spirit of self-sacrifice? What could have inspired Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish priest, to offer to die so that another person's life could be spared? Why do people risk their lives to save the lives of others? If we are able to understand this, we are a step closer to understanding the message of today's readings.

In the gospel reading of today Jesus says, "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant. Whoever wishes to be first among you should be the servant of all. The Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." The life of Jesus continues to inspire and motivate many to spend their lives in service. Jesus took upon himself every human suffering. But through that he let us know the love, mercy, and forgiveness of God. All followers of Christ are invited to follow the example of our master in service. Like Jesus, we are called to grow in our empathy for others. Empathy is a personal commitment to the other. The life and teachings of Jesus should move us to love and serve others and to take care of the poor and needy.

Have you tasted pineapple upside down cake? It is so good. I loved it the first time I tasted it. But soon I realized that I should not have too much of it. I do not know if Mary ever baked a pineapple upside down cake for Jesus. It certainly represents Jesus's values which appear to be upside down. The world says, "Be competitive, get ahead, be first, show yourself, push your way through, be ambitious, and so on. But Jesus says, "Be the last and servant of all, go the extra mile, turn the other cheek, forgive seventy times seven, do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing, give and more will be given to you." Jesus's constant teaching was that we must be humble and willing to serve others.

In the gospel of today we find James and John coming to Jesus with their ambitions goals. The other disciples became indignant with those two because they felt that each of them had an equal or better claim than James and John to fill such top positions. Jesus teaches them that authority consists of service. Christ is the example we are all called to follow. Only those who have mastered themselves can truly serve. What we are facing in the Church today is a result of that. Those who have not mastered themselves have set out to serve. It does not mean that there will be no failures. But they cannot live in failure. A single failure is enough to stop and rethink. Where do you need to master yourself so that you can better serve? What are your stumbling blocks in serving God and His church? What prevents you from serving others? "Whoever wishes to be great must be a servant. Whoever wishes to be first should be the slave of all."