

Greatness through Life of Service and Sacrifice

Today's readings implicitly and explicitly describe and mention three related words: greatness, sacrifice, and service. These words and their descriptions are connected to the life of Christ, which we are invited to imitate. It is the ultimate life of sacrifice of Christ we celebrate in the Eucharist. Thus, in one of the mysteries of faith we proclaim in the Mass, we say: "When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death..." Life of sacrifice comes at the center of service and greatness. Without sacrifice, we cannot serve or achieve greatness.

The prophecy of Isaiah in the first reading describes the life of sacrifice and suffering of Christ through which he won for us the forgiveness of God, "through his suffering my servant shall justify many and their guilt he shall bear." It is through this suffering and sacrifice that Christ has won us the grace and mercy of God, which the letter to the Hebrews in the second reading invites us to "confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for the timely help." The Eucharist we celebrate is one of the thrones of grace Christ has left us to do in his memory for the forgiveness of our sins. This throne of grace offers us "timely help"- the grace of every moment.

Mark's gospel today is well related to the theme of our reflection. It can be divided into three parts. First, the request of the two sons of Zebedee and the response Jesus gave them. It is interesting to point out that history shows that these two apostles have something unique about them. James was the first apostle to die as a martyr, and John was the last of the apostles to die a natural death after all attempts to kill him failed. One can say that they were determined in their request and never meant any harm or were selfishly motivated. Second, their request caused the anger of the rest of the apostles, which led to the third part, the teaching of Jesus on greatness, the life of sacrifice and service. Jesus gave them an example with his life as has been described in the first and second readings.

In the same way, Jesus spoke to his disciples; he has called us together and will send us at the end of Mass to become witnesses to the life of sacrifice and service. He wants us to remember that greatness in him is won not by lording it over or intimidating others with our material, intellectual or social influence but through the life of service. The life of service we are invited to take on can be seen in different aspects of our life, even the minutest aspects. It shows how we can be patient, accommodating, forgiving, and sympathizing with others. It shows itself how we can live above bias and prejudices we usually have against one another that tends to affect our judgment of them. It shows itself when we begin to do good for another for the sake of Christ, even when they don't merit it by our judgment of them. It shows itself when we let go of ego to accommodate others. This is what we see in the life of Christ, which he expresses clearly today: "for the son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." We pray that as we share in this sacrament, which reminds of Christ's self-giving, we become Eucharistic to people we encounter in our daily life. Amen.