

29th Sunday of the Year (Mark)

Can you do me a favour? When we hear these words we wonder what is coming next, what is the favour he or she wants? Will it be possible? Will it compromise us? Is someone trying it on? “Master we want you to do us a favour”, say James and John to Jesus. The favour – the best seats in Jesus’ kingdom. We need to remember the context, Jesus has just told the 12 for the 3rd time that he was to suffer, die and rise again. The first reading spoke vividly of suffering, and we know that suffering is part of our human experience. Often we feel alone in our suffering, overwhelmed by what is happening to us, emotionally drained. It can sometimes be worse when we watch someone we love suffer, especially if there is nothing we can do. At times like this we could do well to pray with the psalmist; may your love be upon us O Lord, as we place all our hope in you.

Jesus, as so often answers James and John with a question about their ability to drink the cup that he will drink, a cup of suffering, to which they reply they can without knowing what it will involve. As to the best seats, they are not for Jesus to give. When the others hear about this they are up in arms which allows Jesus then to speak about his understanding of the proper use of authority, power and leadership. He is critical of any type of leadership which ‘lords it over others’, just as he had been critical of those who laid heavy burdens on others without doing anything to help. No, his model is again an upside down one, true leadership is about service not power. No-one has less power than a slave – anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all. Strong language. And then the punch line – *For the Son of Man himself did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.*

When we think of being a servant or a slave we have to be careful not to think of being subservient. Jesus was never subservient. Think of the times he healed the sick, forgave sinners, restored people to the community, raised the dead, criticised the political and religious leaders, spoke the truth, refused to be put off the path he knew he had to tread if he was to reconcile us to the Father. Think of his sending out first the 12 and then the 72 to do what he had done, proclaim Good News, Heal the sick, cast out devils. Think of his determination to go to Jerusalem and face the ultimate climax between good and evil. That isn’t being subservient that is self giving/sacrificial love.

And this self giving love goes on today between husbands and wives, parents and children, young and old. It may be tending to the sick, visiting a hospital or care home, donating to a food bank, teaching English to refugees. It may be refusing to accept double standards, exposing injustice or prejudice, never resorting to violence, verbal or physical. If we take Jesus’ words about servant leadership to heart, then we will find that the best seats in his kingdom are located wherever people suffer from drug and substance abuse, from domestic violence, from loneliness and hopelessness. We will recognise that it is the Church’s mission, and therefore our mission to serve others and show them the good news of freedom in Christ. Joined with Christ in service we will be free to challenge those forces that breed hatred and malice and arrogance and callousness in our world, and to speak out against injustice and greed. We will walk alongside those who suffer and in doing so will offer them hope, show them mercy and be a small example of Christ who came “not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.”

Bidding Prayers for the 29th Sunday of the Year

Celebrant:

May your love be upon us, O Lord, as we place all our hope in you. With these words of today's psalm in our minds and hearts, we turn to God in prayer.

Reader;

For the Church, especially for those who hold positions of responsibility – that they will hear and put into practice Jesus' words about servant leadership.

Lord in your mercy

For our political and civic leaders – that they will never abuse the power they have been given, but remember they are to serve those whom they govern.

Lord in your mercy

For the powerless, especially those who suffer from poverty, injustice or rejection – that those with power will do all they can to bring about a change for the better.

Lord in your mercy

For those who are sick in body, mind or spirit, especially those whose lives have been affected by dementia – that they and their families will receive the love and support they need at this time.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the Covid 19 pandemic, for Sir David Arness MP who was murdered on Friday, and Thomas Boyle, Pauline Higgins, Mary Greenwood, John Kehoe, Mary Margaret Palmer, Denis Greenwood and Edmund Bottomley whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

Loving God, your Son teaches us that to serve is the way to live in your kingdom. Help us to be selfless for the benefit of others. Help us to make our world a place of genuine equality and peace. Through Christ our Lord. Amen