

October 21, 2018
Twenty-ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Who is Jesus Christ for you, a champion or is he a servant?

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, thought of Jesus more as a champion than a servant. They thought of Jesus as being a political champion who would defeat the oppressive powers of the Roman occupation on earth and that would be a spiritual champion at the end of time. Champions are people who receive glory; they come home after a glorious victory to ticker-tape parade, or with a big trophy, or their name in the paper. James and John wanted the all the glory but did not yet understand what it meant to be a servant; they didn't grasp the meaning of sacrifice. They certainly did not understand what Jesus was asking when he said to them, "Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? They said with their words, "We can" and as Jesus predicted, they eventually would; they both died a martyr's death. Yet, on that day, they did not yet understand what Jesus said not what they were saying.

How do we Jesus? Look at how James and John approached Jesus, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." Sounds arrogant, right? They were approaching Jesus as a *champion*, someone who could give them what they wanted a special place in victory and on their terms. How about us? Do come to Jesus only looking for what we want? How often do we want him to be the champion to rescue us from our struggles, on our terms and to be victorious without sacrifice, without the cross?

What does it mean for us to come to Jesus as a *servant* rather than a champion? We have an advantage over James and John because we know the whole story; we know the paschal mystery of Jesus's

suffering, death, resurrection, ascension into heaven and sending the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We know that any victory without the cross is a victory that will pass and fade, like a crown of leaves given to a victorious athlete in biblical times. The scriptures teach us to see action of Jesus through his suffering and death on the cross. That is why the letter to the Hebrews says to us today, “. . . We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help” (Hebrews 4:15-16). What is “the throne of grace?” It is the cross. What is “timely help?” It is God’s perfect time, not our timetable. Jesus who is both servant savior calls us to pray as God’s servants. Today is the thirty-second anniversary of my Dad’s death. When he would lead our family in prayer, oftentimes the rosary, he would include a long list of petitions, and then would add, “Dear God, grant this petitions according to your holy will.” St. Augustine says that we pray not to let God know what we want; God knows our needs even better than we do. We pray to open our hearts to receive that God wants to give us.

When we were baptized we were immersed into Jesus’s death and resurrection. When we drink of the Eucharistic cup, we drink of his cup of suffering, the blood that flowed from his side on the cross and we are renewed to be the servants of God. That is why St. Paul of the Cross says “Live in such a way that all may know that you bear outwardly as well as inwardly the image of Christ crucified, the model of all gentleness and mercy.” (Office of Readings for October 20.) My brothers and sisters, we imitate Jesus our servant and champion when we live humble lives of gentleness and mercy and seek God’s will before our own.