

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

(Isaiah 53:10-11; Hebrews 4:14-16; Mark 10:35-45)

by Father Charles Fillion

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Brothers and sisters, most of the time, the homily focuses on the Gospel and sometimes in connection with the first reading. Rarely is the second reading the focus of the homily. Of course, the Letter to the Hebrews is not easy to understand. In fact, the first reading and the Gospel will help us to do that today. The first reading speaks about the mysterious suffering servant who takes upon himself the people's iniquities or sins (Isaiah 53:2-11). The second reading speaks of Christ the high priest, tested in every way like us, but without committing sin. And the Gospel speaks of the Son of Man who has come to give his life in ransom for many. Never forget we always have to put these texts in their context.

Isaiah's mysterious figure of the "suffering servant" is not only a sign of God's love for us, but he also represents all human beings before God. Only God appreciated his servant's true greatness. Because he suffered, he was regarded as a sinner and therefore as one to be despised. Because the servant fulfilled the divine will by suffering for the sins of others, the servant will be rewarded by the Lord.

In the letter to the Hebrews, the author calls Jesus a great high priest (v 14). Jesus has been tested in every way, yet without sin (v 15); this indicates a familiarity with the tradition of Jesus' temptations, not only at the beginning but throughout his public life. Jesus' entire life is steeped in the Scriptures of Israel and he lived and acted out of God's Word.

We need to constantly ask ourselves: Are we deeply engaged with this Word to the point that it really leaves a mark on our lives, shapes our thinking, and motivates and inspires others to act?

Jesus exists for others: he exists to serve. He has been tested in all things like us. He knows all of our difficulties; he knows our human condition from the inside and from the outside. The opposite of a priestly person is a consumer: one who buys, accumulates, collects things. The priest is one who spends and consumes himself for others. Is it any wonder that vocations to the priesthood face immense challenges in cultures of wealth, abundance, consumption, and excess?

"Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Mark 10:38-40). The metaphor of drinking the cup is used in the Old Testament. It refers to acceptance of the destiny assigned by God. In Jesus' case, this involves divine judgment on sin that Jesus the innocent one is to expiate on behalf of the guilty. His baptism is to be his crucifixion and death for the salvation of the human race. The request of James and John for a share in the glory must necessarily include a share in Jesus' sufferings, the endurance of tribulation

and suffering for the gospel. The authority of assigning places of honour in the kingdom is reserved to God.

Whatever authority is to be exercised by the disciples must, like that of Jesus, be transformed into service to others rather than for personal gain. Jesus did not come into the world seeking personal gain, privilege or prestige. Rather, he came for service, and this entailed giving his life up as a ransom.

Priests are ordained to gather God's people, to boldly proclaim the Word of the Lord, to baptize, to celebrate the breaking of the Bread, and to constantly give thanks to God for so many gifts. We are also commissioned to assist those in need and to rouse generosity to the poor, not only here at home, but in other countries in need.

Our ordained ministry demands that we lead by wholehearted example. Nevertheless, we remain unworthy servants, yet sent to do the work of Christ. Who of us can ever be worthy of such a great calling? As human beings, we priests can sin greatly, but the priestly gestures we carry out at the altar or in the confessional, are not invalid or ineffective because of our weakness and sinfulness. After all it is Christ who baptizes, celebrates, reconciles and forgives; the priest is only the instrument. He does this by his ministerial priesthood.

By our baptism, we are all priests, in what we call the baptismal priesthood. Therefore, we are all called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. It is only in suffering that we understand the actions of Jesus. Only in suffering do we understand the suffering of others. A broken, wounded heart is the foundation of the true ministry and shepherding role in the Church today. Not a heart broken in a state of despair, but one opened in loving embrace to the world a broken heart that leads to ultimate joy because we have given it all to God and made place for the entire world in our own hearts.

Jesus is the perfect priest who burns, spends and consumes himself gladly for his brothers and sisters; one who lays down his life for others. The suffering servant of the Lord lives in union and communion with the entire human family. Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many, so must it be for us.

Above and beyond eloquent words in homilies and written texts, we must know Christ and love him. Our friendship with him will be contagious to our contemporaries, and others might recognize the Lord's nobility, beauty and greatness through our faces, our smiles, our hands, our feet, our heart and our weaknesses. We cannot forget that people will fall in the love with the Lord in spite of us, and hopefully because of us.