

When I was in college, I lived in a Catholic fraternity-style house with about ten other guys and we had a great time together. One of the memories that sticks out to me from those days is being in the kitchen with my household brothers cleaning up after meals. Even though we had a working dishwasher, we would gather together in the kitchen after dinner to hand-wash dishes ourselves and get everything put away. We would have music going with guys singing along, we would talk about the day, joke with each other, and see how quickly we could get dishes cleaned without breaking them. We were not always successful at the not breaking part. In fact, we had a “dish graveyard” on one of the window sills in the kitchen where we displayed broken dishes and glasses.

I think those nights were so filled with joy because we were all on the same page: looking to serve each other as part of a Christian community. The world would look at all of the hand-washing as tedious or busy work, but with God’s grace, it wasn’t. I loved those nights and I think the other guys would say the same. When I look back on those times living in that household of Christian brothers, I remember the moments of service as times of profound joy. Another time, after a wedding reception, a group of us stayed to help break down tables and clean up the church hall. We had some music playing and we sang along as we got things cleaned up. It was beautiful! I remember the catering staff saying that they had never seen something like this happen before. They were so grateful for our help.

Those memories remind me of the joy that comes when we allow the grace of Jesus to work in our lives. Certainly things were not always perfect in our men’s household, but when we were open to His help, those times of serving others together were awesome! When we cooperated with the Holy Spirit, we were able to see the true power of laying ourselves down for others in service.

Jesus talks to us in the Gospel this weekend about the importance of service. When the apostles fall into the temptation to self-promoting leadership, Jesus uses the opportunity to re-orient them to the self-giving leadership founded on service. But before we get to what Jesus is telling

the Apostles, let's rewind several hundred years earlier, to the time of Isaiah the prophet.

Isaiah gave several prophecies about a suffering servant who is to come, and today we hear one of them. Isaiah speaks of a servant who will allow himself to be offered up for the sins of others. Through Isaiah, God says, "through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear." Sound familiar? We know that Jesus perfectly fulfilled this prophecy. On the Cross, Jesus became the perfect offering for all of our sins. By offering Himself, He provides us with the ultimate example of self-giving and also the source of grace that will help us give of ourselves with the same generosity.

So, with the understanding that Jesus is the Suffering Servant whom Isaiah foresaw, His rebuke of the Apostles in today's Gospel makes sense. James and John approach Jesus wanting Him to make them great in the worldly sense. They want to sit at Jesus' right and left because they think He is going to be a great king in the worldly sense. They probably imagine Jesus' coming glory as something equivalent to Caesar or one of the great kings of Israel in the past. Those kings were able to have others at their command, and definitely not planning to carry a cross for them!

Jesus knows that His glory is not going to be in worldly victory and power, but actually in an apparent defeat in the eyes of the world. Instead of having glory and leading at the expense of others, Jesus' glory will be in serving others. The glory of the Lord is in the Cross, in pouring out His life so that we all might truly live. And there is infinite, awesome power in the Cross. Thus, true leadership, as Jesus teaches us by the Cross, isn't about seeing how many people we get to have power over, it is about seeing how many we can touch by giving of ourselves. It is in self-giving that we experience the glory that Jesus made us for. The Cross teaches us what true leadership looks like. The Cross is the source of that leadership! Jesus shows us by the Cross that true leadership is servant leadership.

Going back to those moments of serving together with my brothers and sisters in Christ in college, I recognize that, by God's grace, there was a culture of servant leadership among us all. I learned so much from the people I lived with during that time because they had their hearts set on Jesus and His Cross. The leaders exercised their authority by giving themselves for others. When we were washing dishes in the kitchen, it was a training ground for servant leadership. The people who lead the charge with cleanup lead by giving their best and so everyone else chipped in, giving their best to get the work done. When we served together, we were filled with joy! I can think of so many people in my life who have been good servant leaders to me: both my parents, teachers, priests, and others. Servant leaders are great because they raise up other leaders.

I pray that our parish community will continue to grow in servant leadership. Jesus wants to help you be servant leaders as parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters and friends. He wants to help you be the one who pours yourself out in love for others. He wants to touch many people through your loving self-gift in His grace. The question is, will you let Him? Will you open your heart to His grace today to say, "Yes Lord, help me by the grace of Your Cross to die to myself so that I might live for others"? Our parish will flourish the more you allow Jesus to form your heart as a servant leader. Each of you has gifts and talents that can help lift others up and bring them closer to Jesus and His life changing grace. Let's pray now that we would abandon selfishness so that our hearts can be more open to lead through service by Jesus' grace.

*+ Heavenly Father, thank you for sending us Jesus to give His life as our ransom! Jesus, thank you for teaching us about true leadership. Thank You for giving us your grace through the Cross so that we might serve others well. Help us to see those who need our loving service. Holy Spirit, give us abundant generosity of heart so that we can lead others well through giving ourselves fully for them. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen. +*