

Homily  
October 20, 2024  
29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
17:00 – 24:24

How many of you here have a runny nose? (hand raised) How many of you here feel it's cold in this church? (hand raised) Do you know that the temperature in here is about the same as when the air conditioning is on? I looked. So the coldness continues until that marvelous day when the boiler is fired-up, and the steam crosses the bottom of the parking lot and finds its way to those coils in the tunnel here (pointing at the main aisle). And then it will be warm. And you will tell me, "It's too hot in here!" (throwing his hands in the air) Forty-two years I have heard such when it is this time of year. But no matter.

A number of years ago I was at a workshop on cultures and leadership. I learned that the many cultures in Latin America see leadership differently. For example, in some countries in Central America, the leader is the one who brings people together. They work on decisions together and together they get things done.

In some other countries, like Mexico, the leader is "El Jefe," the boss, who guides everyone in what they do. And often this "jefe" makes his or her leadership felt by all of those being led.

This is also true of the missionaries coming to us from other countries. For instance, some priests from Africa are treated at home as if they were "chiefs." Their culture holds them as above the people, even above question. But when they come to the United States to serve our parishes, they often have a hard time adjusting to our culture's understanding of leadership. Our culture in parish life is more collaborative and cooperative, with much delegation of authority. It's a hard adjustment.

In our Gospel today, James and John approach Jesus. They are known as, "The Sons of Thunder," and quickly prove why. They virtually demand that Jesus grant their request. They seem brazen, pushy, demanding. "We want you to do for us whatever we ask of you," they say.

Now in the Gospel according to Matthew, it is their mother who speaks with such boldness. Perhaps it was a family trait to be blunt.

Jesus' reply reveals the cultural difference between the Gentile – Greek/Roman - style of leadership and that of a disciple of Christ. Gentile rulers were typically forceful. They made people feel their authority by words, looks, elevated stature with chairs on pedestals, their clothes, the distance they kept from the common folk, and their use of physical force.

But Jesus demands a culture change for those who would lead others to God's kingdom. Leaders in God's kingdom are to be servants, always. Leaders in God's kingdom will suffer for those whom they serve, as did the Suffering Servant in our First Reading today, the last of the four Suffering Servant Songs, indeed the very last verses of the fourth Suffering Servant Song. Leaders in God's kingdom must be in touch with the reality of the people whom they serve, as was noted in the Second Reading from the letter to the Hebrews, as it reflected upon the role of Christ.

For Jesus' disciples, this is a hard lesson. Even for the others, who not as brazen as James and John, were jealous of their request. They resented what was asked. And they, like James and John, needed to be led by Jesus to a new culture of leadership. ***"It shall not be so with you."***

Brothers and sisters, we see in Pope Francis such a leader in the mold of Christ. He is, as he once said in a press conference on the way home from the United States, "I am the servant of the servants of God." Indeed, that is one of the titles of the Roman Pontiff: ***The servant of the servants of the people of God.*** He disliked being compared to a Rock Star by a reporter. For that is an attitude he does not want to cultivate with people. Nor within himself.

All this raises some questions. No matter our country of origin or its culture, how do we see leadership of God's people and how would we lead? How do we lead in our families, in our homes, at work, in our parish? Do we find ourselves at times lording it over others to get them to do what we want, when we want it, how we want it done? I have to be careful with that one because I can be very particular about things. Right, Julie? (And she says, "Uh-huh.")

On the other hand, do we seek to lead so that we will be noticed, applauded, thanked? Like the Pharisees in the Gospels?

Or, my brothers and sisters, do we accept leadership as it comes to us, recalling that we serve that others might serve and be served? And do we accept that there will be redemptive suffering to be intentionally faced and embraced, as leaders to the kingdom?

I hope we all ponder these questions this week and then ask the Lord Jesus to give us the strength to live the culture of leadership which he has shown us.