

PASTOR'S WEEKLY MESSAGE FOR THE 25TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME B

“If anyone wants to be the first...”

We read in today's Gospel that when Jesus was in the house, He asked the Apostles what they were arguing about on the road? They said *'nothing'* because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest! This happened more than once among the Apostles. They want to have good standing—*first* place. They look for benefits and privileges. They are trying to get positions of honor. They want to be before and above the others around them. Jesus tries to correct their ways. “He sat down, called the twelve to Him and said: “If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all.” The Apostles did not like this... What about ourselves?

I think we feel very much like the Apostles... The idea of being a servant is not something we like very much. We feel that sort of thing is too low for us. We ask ourselves what is the root of this attitude of wanting to be always the first, or the greatest? In many, *if not in most*, of us there is this ambition or great desire for power. We want to have a say—and more than that—we want to be in control of things, and even people! We want to be among the leaders, at the top with those who *give* the commands, not those who *receive* them. We want to be the *big* people. We wish to be counted among those who make the important decisions.

Have you ever closely watched someone who thinks he is an important man? Look at the way he dresses, the way he walks, the way he stands as he listens to somebody talking to him. See him as he stops to receive the greetings of those who admire him. Perhaps you knew him before he got a position of power. He was kind and pleasant to everybody. Now, he is completely changed—the way he looks at people, the tone of his voice with some touch of command in it, the gesture of the hands—everything gives the message: *I am a big man, pay attention!* Of such a person, people say: ‘He is full of himself.’ And it is very true.

The danger with someone who is *full of himself* is that there is so little place for others in his life. Indeed, often, other people are brushed aside, even crushed down by such a person. Everything and everyone comes after the needs of that person...to become ‘the greatest’ and to have more and more power. In the second reading, St. James says: “Whenever you find jealousy and ambition, you find disharmony, and wicked things of every kind being done. Where do these wars and battles between yourselves start? Isn't it precisely in the desire fighting inside your own selves? You want something and you haven't got it; so, you are prepared to kill. You have an ambition that you can not satisfy; so, you fight to get your way by force.”

We may not go as far as killing people to get what we want, but some of us push others out of the way in a very un-Christian manner, at times. We often hear the saying *'he is drunk with power.'* Yes, like people getting drunk on alcohol, there are people who *get drunk* with the power they have... It goes to their heads. And like drunk people, such a person becomes loud, ready to argue, and to fight with others. Often, too, they are hard and demanding on people around them. All of this to feed their sense of importance.

If we look at Jesus, He was not in a position of power, but He was a man of power—power in His speech. People would say they'd never heard anyone speaking as He had. Power in His actions, healing the sick, driving out demons, raising the dead... Even the wind and the sea obeyed Him! Yet, there was nothing in Him of those hard and commanding ways that we have just been talking about. Quite the opposite. He made Himself the servant of everyone. All those in need could come to Him, He would help them. He was truly ‘at their service.’ And no *'office hours only'* policy was applied when someone came to be cured. No *'by appointment only'* rule was in force to be received by Him. He was *always* there to help, to answer the needs of everyone who came to Him.

Very often, the real test of a Christian is there—in the way he/she uses the power given to them. Each one of us has been given some power. The man in the house, the mother at home, the manager at the office, the headmaster in school, etc. Even in our Church groups and associations: the chairman of the Parish Council, the Choirmaster, the Catechists, etc.—all those people also have some powers given to them. The question asked of each one of us today is: *How do we use our power?* Do we use it as Jesus used His power—for the good of others? Or, for our own selfish desire to be ‘the first’ and ‘the greatest?’ If you want to be the greatest, be the greatest servant of those around you.