



Have you ever found a picture of yourself from long ago and in the picture you are doing something really dumb or immature? Or, can you think back on a conversation you had with someone in which something came blurring out of your mouth that maybe you didn't really mean to say? When we look back on these kinds of moments, we can become very embarrassed by ourselves and our behavior. That's the situation that we see with the Apostles James and John here today.

They ask Jesus, "Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left." Now they are saying, "Honor us." "Put us above the rest." They are even kind of demanding it from the Lord. They are being boastful and proud and self-seeking, saying, "Give us honor." When they looked back on this moment, they must have been very embarrassed.

Incidentally, this scene and others like it provide us with a proof of the truth of the Gospels. If the Gospels were just made up by human beings to spread a hoax, they would have never portrayed the Apostles in such a bad light. Rather, the Gospels give us true pictures of what the Apostles were really like – very human – indeed, fallen humans.

Jesus is very patient with them. He doesn't berate them. Rather, He uses the moment to teach them. Self-seeking has no place in the life of the Christian. The Christian is to make himself or herself a servant. True greatness comes from serving others.

Think of the people that we would name as truly great: Mother Theresa, Pope John Paul II. Wouldn't we say that these are the kinds of people that are truly great? In fact, I think that you could say that the more a person becomes a servant to others, the more they become truly great, truly amazing, because they are then reflecting more and more the greatness of God. The one who serves in this way is not looking for greatness, only looking to love in service; but God's beauty shines forth in that humble, loving service.

I don't know if you have caught this in the news, but last week Pope Benedict gave the world a new saint, Saint Damien. Damien was Belgian. He came from a devout Catholic family in the 1800s, and at the age of 18 he entered a religious order and studied to become a priest. He prayed every day to become a missionary. His brother who was also a religious was already a missionary in Hawaii. His brother became ill and Brother Damien, although not yet a priest, asked his superiors if he could go to Hawaii in place of his brother. He reached Hawaii after a 5-month journey. He was ordained a priest soon after. He continued to preach and evangelize Hawaii, which was very pagan at the time.

But, on the island of Molokai there were lepers who were made to live in strict isolation. Leprosy is a bacterial disease that eats the skin and causes terrible disfigurement, oozing sores, a putrid smell, and so forth. But the lepers needed a priest and Father Damien volunteered. He reached out in every way possible to the lepers, touching them and healing their souls by God's power. The leper colony became a haven of holiness. Father Damien served the lepers for 12 years without contracting the disease, until finally he did and died of leprosy in 1889.

Father Damien, now Saint Damien, was a true servant in the model of Jesus Himself, risking his own health and life to bring the Gospel and the Sacraments to this isolated colony. Just as Jesus became one of us to take away our sins, so Saint Damien was willing to become a leper to give God's grace to the lepers.

None of us may be asked to do such dramatic things. We don't have to become world-famous in our service to reflect the beauty and greatness of God. God calls each of each in our own place, according to our own vocations, to become a servant after the model of Jesus.

We may look at ourselves and think that it is impossible. We may see our own selfishness. Again, the witness of the Apostles gives us great hope, because they, like us, are filled with arrogance and self-seeking; and yet the Lord transformed them into true servants, and Jesus wishes to transform us too.

**Fr. Mark Gurtner at St. Anthony de Padua Church, South Bend
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