

"If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all AND the servant of all."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, an old monk prayed many years for a 'vision' from God to strengthen his faith, **but**, and there's that proverbial **BUT** in life already, my friends, it-just-never-came! He had almost given up hope, when, one day, a vision appeared! The old monk was overjoyed.

BUT...right in the middle of the vision, the monastery bell rang! The ringing of the bell meant it was time to feed the poor, who gathered daily at the monastery gate.

It was the old monk's turn to feed them. If he failed to show up with the food, the unfortunate people would leave quietly, thinking the monastery had nothing to give them that day.

The old monk was torn between his earthly duty and his heavenly vision. But, before that bell stopped ringing, the monk made his decision. With a heavy heart..... he turned his back on his vision and went off to feed the less fortunate.

Nearly an hour later, the monk returned to his room. When he opened the door, he could hardly believe his eyes. There, in the room, was the vision, waiting for him.

As the humble monk dropped to his knees in thanksgiving, the vision said to him:

"My son, had you NOT gone off to feed the poor & less fortunate, I would NOT have stayed."

I share that story with you because it bears a striking resemblance to the one I just read to you from the Gospel of St. Mark.

Like the disciples, the monk gave up everything to follow Jesus.

Like the disciples, the monk turned his back on the material wealth to gain... the spiritual wealth.

Like the disciples, after he had done all these things, he learned the most important spiritual lesson of his life. He learned that...

The best way to serve God is NOT necessarily to give up everything.

The best way to serve God is NOT necessarily to turn one's back on the world in some monastery.

The best way to serve God is NOT necessarily to spend hours in prayer, contemplating visions.

The best way to serve God IS to do something far more basic.

*The best way to serve God is to **reach out in service to our brothers & sisters**, especially those less gifted or as fortunate as ourselves.*

Jesus taught his disciples this lesson, saying:

"Whoever wants to be first... must place himself... last of all... AND... be the servant of all!"

Now, this raises a most important question:

'How can we translate Jesus' teaching into our daily life?' you ask. Well, I'm glad you asked that question.

Even as we ask that question, we realize that there is no single answer to it, for there are as many answers to it as there are people! So, no one can answer it for us. We MUST answer it for ourselves.

Nevertheless, it might help us to look at how one, young man answered that question.

Once upon a time, there was a young fellow, who, at the age of 12, lost a leg to cancer. Periodically after that, the press carried a photograph of him skiing with one leg or playing football with an artificial limb. However, you may have read about him in another capacity.

The young man's name is Ted Kennedy, Jr. and he crisscrossed the country, addressing handicapped people, especially the young.

He attributed his positive attitude toward his own handicap to his family and friends. He said:

"They never made me feel different."

On top of that, he frankly admitted that he knew he had the best doctors in the world and the best treatment available on the planet. He said at the time:

“One of the reasons why I’m trying to help other handicapped people is that I want to repay some of that debt. It takes so little from me to make others feel better... that it would be unthinkable not to make the effort.”

That last sentence deserves repeating.

It takes so little from me to make others feel better... that it would be unthinkable not to make the effort.”

Few of us have the leisure of Ted Kennedy, Jr. Few of us have the time or the financial security to do the kind of work he did at that point in his life. Yet, I can’t help wondering about something.

“Wondering about what?” you ask? Well, I am glad you asked that question! (Just testing you.)

Even if you and I HAD the leisure, the time, and the financial security to do the kind of work he did, how many of us would use those gifts as generously as he did?

This brings me back to the original question. How can we, personally, respond to Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel? **How can we translate Jesus’ teachings into our daily lives?** Specifically:

“Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all... AND... be the servant of all!”

As I said, no one can answer that question for us. We must answer it for ourselves!

And so, today’s Gospel contains, as it so often does, an **‘invitation’** and a **‘challenge.’**

1st, it **invites** us to take inventory of our lives & ask ourselves:

‘What is our spirit of service... in the work we are doing right here, right now—whether we are a mother raising small children or someone involved in office, factory, or volunteer work? Regardless ...what is our attitude of service?’

2nd, it **challenges** us to take a few minutes off in the week ahead and ask ourselves, sincerely:

“How can I bring to my work a greater spirit of service in response to Jesus’ teaching?”

I now close with these profound words of Albert Schweitzer, a gifted, wealthy, servant of humankind:

“I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know (& it’s never too late): the only ones among you who will really be happy are those who sought and found... how to serve.”

I repeat those words:

“I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know (& it’s never too late): the only ones among you who will really be happy are those who sought and found... how to serve.”

May our ever present, ever powerful, ever perfect God, our Abba, bless you...
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.