

Year B 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Oct. 21, 2012
Is 53:10-11; Ps 33; Heb 4:14-16; Mk 10:35-45

This Sunday the readings present us with the contrast between Jesus the Servant and us, who are prone to seek to serve ourselves. From the beginning, Adam sought to be like God in an inappropriate way, snatching at fruit on a tree that promised to give insight (Gn 3:6). Christ, being in the form of God, did not deem being equal to God something to “snatch,” Phil 2:6. Rather, Jesus became a servant, reversing Adam’s sin, taking the form of a slave, lowering himself and becoming obedient to the point of the most humiliating death, on a cross. This is how Jesus truly obtained “insight,” as the first verse on the “Song of the Suffering Servant,” Is 52:13-53:12, says. This “song” or poem speaks of Yahweh’s Servant who was considered accursed, so disfigured was his form and appearance as he was led to the slaughter like a lamb who opens not his mouth. But it was in fact our sins that the Servant bore, his wounds which brought us peace and salvation. It was the Lord’s will that his Servant should suffer thus for us, to offer (really, *empty*) his life as a sin-offering. Jesus, who emptied himself (Phil 2:7), saw himself as giving up his life in fulfillment of God’s commandment, Jn 10:17-18 (in the Good Shepherd discourse). At the last supper, Jesus enacted his servant-role by washing the disciples’ feet.

In contrast, two of Jesus’ most prominent followers want top positions in Jesus’ “glory” (Mt 20:21 has “kingdom,” and it is the mother who petitions!). Jesus instead speaks to them about the suffering following him entails, which they say they are ready enough to endure. The others were irritated by this, and may have been envious, but Jesus contrasts the ethic of the kingdom with the ways of the world, in which the prominent want to outshine others. The greatest should be like Jesus, a servant, who came to give his life. Interestingly, Luke places this episode of the dispute over who was the best *during the last supper*, after Judas’ betrayal, and even says that he, Jesus, is among them as one who serves at table! (Lk 22:21-27). And note that the verb “lord it over” in Mk 10:42 is found in 1 Pt 5:3 applied to leaders in the Church.

We recently lost one among us who embodied greatness because he truly was a servant, Senator Phil Lewis, who sought what was best for his people and not just for his party, leaving behind universal recognition that he was a good man. Real goodness, sanctity, imposes itself without need of words or protestations. If only politicians, no matter what their armband says,

would follow his example. In the communion of saints in which we all share, I was glad to have sat at table with him last year.