

Sermon 9 23 18 (Taize was on Sat.)

What/*who* do we think of when we hear the word “servant”? Somebody in a fancy uniform? Someone to clean up after us? How about all us parents? Ever feel like your kids’ servant? It doesn’t always change as they get older either! Picking up after them – picking them up and driving them everywhere? Do we like it? Do we resent it? Is our servanthood part of our duty, part of our love? I know I was often my kids’ servant, but I never wanted to think of myself as their servant! At least not at the time. Now, in memory, I don’t mind it so much (if at all!).

Do we think of Jesus when we hear the word “servant”? Do we think of priests, bishops, ...popes? Pope Francis knelt to wash the feet of prison inmates. Did he do it because their feet were dirty? No! He did it to illustrate the role he believes he plays in peoples’ lives. To be God’s servant for them. Jesus talks about being servants for each other in our Gospel for today.

In our gospel reading, the disciples were looking for an idealized outcome to their travels with Jesus – for the outcome they wanted. They were even arguing about who got to be in the best position with him. Like children!

Jesus told them repeatedly what was going to happen to him, but they just could not understand what he was saying and the Gospel of Mark suggests that perhaps they didn’t want to. They were afraid to ask him, to know too much. Better to have their perfect vision.

This was a point in their spiritual journey where they were like children. In fact, the argument Jesus tried to settle between them was like an argument between children. You know. We all remember. “I’m the coolest!” “No! *I’m* the coolest!!” Fighting to sit next to the very *coolest* kid. Status. Status games overtake us from nursery school on. “I’m the most important!” “No! *I* am!” “I’m the best friend!” “Jesus likes *me* best!” “No! He likes me *better!*” “*I’m* going to be most important in the new kingdom!” Like kids on the playground.

When they finally arrived at a house in Capernaum, Jesus asked the disciples what they had been arguing about. He probably knew, but he wanted to hear them say it. They were ashamed of themselves, so they were silent.

And that’s when Jesus turned their expectations upside down. Jesus told his

disciples something he illustrated at the Last Supper when he washed their feet – the hardest thing they had to learn, and the hardest thing for anyone who aspires to true leadership to learn. “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” They probably didn’t want to hear that, but they did hear it and ultimately, they did learn it. Their leadership, their role in spreading the Good News, was never going to be about status. It was going to be about giving. It was going to be about sharing of themselves. It was going to be about serving others.

It’s ironic. Service in God’s name is so *hard*, yet it’s so *joyous*. I’m not sure how that works... but it does!

Then Jesus brought a child to sit in the midst of them. A child! In the middle of these important men! What did they think of that? What could they possibly learn from a child? Hmmm!

You’ve all seen it here. Sometimes, when we have a children’s sermon, the simplest, most direct, most highly spiritual things will come out of the mouths of our children.

People sometimes ask me – “How can you give the Eucharist to a child? How can a child understand the Eucharist?” My answer to that is, “Are you presuming *you* understand the Eucharist?” The Eucharist is a mystery. *Nobody* understands the Eucharist! We partake of the Eucharist to let it happen to us. And it happens differently every time.

If a child reaches for the Eucharist, I am very willing to give it to him or her. I firmly believe that children understand many things in their own way, sometimes, oftentimes, better than we do. And I have every confidence that their understanding is profound.

I remember once giving the wafer to a little girl who was still a toddler. She couldn’t even stand at the rail without leaning on it. But she took that wafer, and she held it up in the air, and she *fractioned* it! Maybe she was just copying me, but that’s OK. The Eucharist was meaningful for her. And that’s all God asks of us at the Eucharist: for the Eucharist to be meaningful for us.

When Jesus told his disciples that they were supposed to welcome even children, just like the child he had sitting on his lap, he was telling them that they were supposed to welcome *everyone*. And just as adults are often servants to children, he was telling them and us that we can expect to become servants for everyone, even those we may not like. And that means everyone. That is what true leadership is about. That is what true

capability is about.

Jesus came to serve us and to teach us how to serve others.

Jesus is our servant. He came to serve us to the utmost, to the fullest. And we are his children. One of the most important lessons that Jesus teaches us is that just as he serves us, we are supposed to serve each other.

It reminds me of the hymn by Richard Gillard.

“Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you; pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey, and companions on the road; we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you in the night-time of your fear; I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping; when you laugh I’ll laugh with you; I will share your joy and sorrow till we’ve seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven we shall find such harmony, born of all we’ve known together of Christ’s love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you; pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.”