

## To Be Great, Be A Servant

**Is. 53: 10-11; Ps. 33; Heb. 4: 14-16; Mk. 10: 35-45**

‘Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.’ So said the two apostles, James and John. Perhaps you found this statement as jarring as I did. Such disrespect! What child would be allowed to make such a demand of his parents? What student would dare treat his teacher in such a way?

But here is where Jesus reveals His divinity once again. Instead of reacting to this impertinence as most of us would, by becoming angry and putting them in their places, He treats them gently and instructs them in the ways of God yet again.

The two apostles had envisioned Jesus going to Jerusalem and taking His place on the throne of His kingdom and they saw themselves at His right hand and His left basking in His reflected glory. Jesus told them that they should be careful what they asked for and to be prepared to receive it. He told them that they would share in His glory but, before that, there would be rejection, suffering and death.

As He had done previously when He overheard the apostles arguing about who was the greatest (Mk. 9: 35), Jesus explained that, to be considered great, one must be the servant of everyone. In saying this, Jesus was telling His apostles that they should not be planning for greatness. They should not struggle for greatness; rather, they should only seek to be a servant and greatness would follow.

We often have difficulty with this message. It doesn’t seem to square with how we see success and greatness being achieved in the world. We may accept that, in the eyes of God, the servant will be the greatest of all. ‘The last shall be first and the first last.’ (Mk. 10:31). But in this world, greatness seems to be the product of much planning, scheming, and struggling to accumulate wealth, power and prestige. Servants and slaves are not considered to be positions of greatness.

And yet, even in this world, we have seen people who have fulfilled the role of the servant, not struggling for greatness, who have achieved greatness through their service to others. We think of St. Andre Bessette who, from his lowly position as a porter at a boys’ school in Montreal, was able to perform many healings and to oversee the building of St. Joseph’s Oratory. By the time of his death, St. Andre was well-known by the rich and famous.

Also, we think of St. Teresa of Calcutta who, beginning as an unremarkable teacher at a girls’ school, humbled herself to work among the ‘poorest of the poor’ in Calcutta. She founded an order of missionary sisters, established many houses of charity around the world, and became the one of the most influential people on earth, advising many world leaders and celebrities.

From these two examples, we can see that we do not need to strive for greatness. We can humble ourselves and be servants to others and greatness will be conferred on us.

Jesus said repeatedly: ‘The Kingdom of God is near at hand.’ Therefore, we can have confidence that we do not have to wait until we die and approach the judgment seat to be considered great. Through our lives of service, we will have achieved greatness in this life and in the life t.