# “How to be Number One in Heaven”

In our Gospel reading Jesus announced to His disciples for the second time His coming passion and resurrection as they were passing through His district on their way to Jerusalem. Last week was the first time He foretold them of these two events. On both occasions, Jesus revealed to His disciples His passion and at the same time His resurrection.

He let them know how He would suffer just as predicted in our first reading. Jesus wanted them and us to know that mysteriously, as His followers, our suffering in this life would also lead to our resurrection to life. Part of that suffering, needed for our salvation according to Jesus, requires service and letting go of whatever might shackle us to this world.

His disciples on the other hand did not get it! They could only think about the glory they would enjoy as His followers. All they wanted to know was who would be ranked number one in His earthly kingdom. Jesus was always talking to them about His heavenly kingdom, while they were thinking about an earthly kingdom.

Most of us like the disciples like to be number one in everything we do. It could be in school, on the playground, or at work. Being number one gives us a sense of accomplishment and superiority over others. We feel like we can do whatever we do better than anyone else.

However, Jesus tells us in the gospel that to be number one in heaven we have to be the last of all and servant of all on earth. This means we have to empty ourselves let go our egos, get in the trenches, and ***“smell like the sheep”*** as Pope Francis said. It means we have to serve others which includes, accepting in the name of Jesus, the Gospel and any suffering that might come with doing so.

Jesus is not telling us to think whatever we do is worth nothing He is not telling us to think less of ourselves but He wants us to think of ourselves less. He wants us to die to self, which is an attitude that will make us more sensitive to the need of others and serve them more in the name of God.

Then Jesus did something unusual; in the Middle Eastern culture, were children were greatly loved, appreciated, and desired in the family. They provided our modern day ***“social security”*** for their parents because they were bound to take care of them during their old age.

A wife was never fully accepted into the male dominated family until she bears a child.

However, children were not placed first they were placed last in the family. For example when there was famine and food was scarce, children will be fed last.

As St. Thomas Aquinas said, if there is a raging fire, a husband was obliged to save his father first, then his mother, next his wife and last of all, his child. A minor child was considered equal to a slave. It is only after a child reached the age of maturity that the child was considered a person to be valued. But then in our Gospel, Jesus put children ahead of everybody else.

To illustrate His point, Jesus called one of the children and putting His arms around the child. Jesus used the child as a symbol of all in the society who are defenseless, marginalized, vulnerable, and those who cannot help themselves. He told His disciples that when they extend hospitality to them, they do so to Him and also His Father who sent Him.

Jesus’ message to the twelve was, if they wanted to become like Him, they should imitate Him and to imitate Him means service. Jesus said He came to serve and not to be served. He also said, we should love our neighbors as ourselves, implying that we should love ourselves otherwise we will not know how to love our neighbors.

We are called to imitate Jesus by serving those who are vulnerable by shielding them from harm as Jesus shielded the child by wrapping His arms around the child. He wrapped His arm around the child like a mama bear would protect her cub from any danger. Jesus wants us to be keepers of our most vulnerable sisters and brothers.

As we come to receive Him in the Eucharist, let us renew or promise to serve Him by serving the poor and the marginalized.