

Called to Serve
29th Sunday of Ordinary Time
October 21, 2018

There was a Roman aqueduct at Segovia, Spain. It was built in 109 A.D. For eighteen hundred years, it carried cool water from the mountains to the hot and thirsty city. Nearly sixty generations of people drank from its flow. Then came a recent generation, who said, "This aqueduct is so great a marvel that it ought to be preserved for our children, as a museum piece. We shall relieve it of its centuries-long labour."

They did; they laid modern iron pipes. They gave the ancient bricks and mortar a reverent rest. And what happened to the aqueduct? It began to fall apart. The sun beating on the dry mortar caused it to crumble. The bricks and stone sagged and threatened to fall. What ages of service could not destroy idleness disintegrated.

There is an important lesson for us here that gets to the heart of today's Gospel. How easy it is for us to want to be served rather than to serve. But when we adopt this attitude idleness can set in and life loses its purpose and meaning. It disintegrates.

James and John were looking for the day when they could be served, thereby becoming kind of like a museum piece. Thrones on either side of Jesus, that would give them power, position in the kingdom that is coming. But they missed completely the nature of Jesus' kingdom. We know that the other 10 apostles were also clueless about what Jesus was after. When they overheard James and John, they became indignant because they thought the Zebedee brothers were pulling a fast one.

But do you remember how Jesus responded to them? He said you don't know what you are asking. For it isn't mine, he said, to determine who will sit on my right and left. Jesus wasn't thinking of reigning from a throne but from the Cross. It wouldn't be James and John, but the two criminals crucified with him who would flank his right and left. Then later, it is true, James and John would share in what Jesus calls his cup and baptism. These were references to the Lord's suffering through his trial, passion and crucifixion. Indeed, James was the first of the twelve apostles to be martyred and John, though we believe died a natural death, did laborious work in a stone quarry on the Island of Patmos, into old age.

Jesus wanted to twelve to realize that when they came to truly understand his death they would choose the life-giving way of service.

The key verse in today's Gospel is quoted most often in the Documents of Vatican II. Vatican II was the biggest meeting held in the history of the world, over the course of 3 years in the 1960s.

During four sessions, held between October 1962 and December 1965 all the Bishops of the Catholic Church gathered to deliberate and articulate what it means to be the Catholic Church in the Modern World. It was Mark 10:45 that they quoted most frequently:

For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”¹

This is Jesus’ mission statement and the Vatican II Fathers declared it therefore to be the Church’s too.

When he says he came to give his life as a ransom, we think of someone paying a ransom to a kidnapper, to buy back someone who has been taken hostage. Jesus is declaring here that we have been taken hostage by the devil and are captive to him. Jesus’ death was the ransom he paid to buy us back.

In our Old Testament readings from the Isaiah and Psalm 33 we are given insight into the effects of Jesus’ ransom. In Mark, Jesus is quoting from Isaiah 53. Our Old Testament reading for today, verses 10 and 11, is part of a much longer poem that is known as the Suffering Servant Song. One of the most famous verses George Frederick Handel set to music in his Messiah:

***All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.²***

Like James and John, we all go astray having visions of a world where we will be served and dominate others. This is the essence of original sin and shows how we have been taken hostage by the devil. Listen to the ransom language that follows in Isaiah 53 – what we heard earlier:

***Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain.
When you make his life an offering for sin,³
The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.⁴***

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mk 10:45). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Is 53:6). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Is 53:10). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Is 53:11). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

Do you hear the repeated emphasis on how Jesus in bearing our iniquities will make us righteous? What does it mean to be made righteous? Our psalm gives an answer:

***Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast love,
19 to deliver their soul from death,
and to keep them alive in famine.***⁵

Jesus has ransomed our souls from death. Of course, this means ultimate death, but it also has consequences for us now, to be kept alive as we journey through the wilderness this present world – where so many experience a spiritual famine, because of not knowing Jesus. Jesus desires for us in the present to be people who know what Jesus has done to free us from the devil’s captivity. Because of this we know his steadfast love in the present and learn to live hopefully.

What is one expression of such hope? It is to give our lives in service of others so that we are willing to participate in the ministry of the suffering servant. A world held ransom by the devil is evidenced by domination, where “their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.”⁶

But there is another kingdom not so obvious, but like the Segovia aqueduct is to bring the living waters of the Gospel of Jesus to a thirsty world. The Church is to be this aqueduct.

In these weeks during October and early November I am focussing on the theme is stewardship. A steward is a person who have been entrusted with an estate belonging to another. We have been entrusted with that part of King Jesus’ estate called St. Peter’s Parish.

Pope Benedict XVI said there are three dimensions of this stewardship: worship, evangelization and service.

As is clear from today’s homily our Gospel text is calling us to respond to the service Jesus has offered us by learning to serve others. This is a form a stewardship where we are learning what the disciples would learn:

that whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.⁷

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Ps 33:18–19). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mk 10:42). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁷ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mk 10:43–44). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

At St. Peter's we have the following ministries of service. Audio visual, Catholic Women's League, Knights of Columbus, Church Linens, Feed the Hungry, Decorating, Funeral Lunches, Outdoor Gardens, Recycling and Society of St. Vincent de Paul. For all engaged in these ministries thank you. For those who might be looking for a way to serve, on the First Sunday of Advent, December 2nd, we will have tables representing all of these service ministries, where you can find out more about them, and if you wish, sign up to join.

Service is the way that like the Segovia aqueduct we can bring the vital water of Jesus' compassion into the life of others and so live out the Vision of Vatican II, to serve as Jesus served, who gave his life as a ransom for many.