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Commentary on the Gospel: Serving with a Great Heart

Gospel for the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B), and commentary.

Gospel (*Mk* 10:35-45)

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”

And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?”

And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”

Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”

And they said to him, “We are able.”

And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the

Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be servant of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Commentary

On the road to Jerusalem, James and John seem to sense that the events in Jesus' life are coming to a culmination. Perhaps they notice that popular support for their Master is at its zenith, and that at any moment he will openly manifest he is the Messiah. The reign of Jesus is about to begin and they want to

secure a good position in his government.

Our Lord is not disheartened by the limited vision of James and John. In fact, he takes advantage of the opportunity to explain to the Twelve a key point of his teaching: that those who are great in his kingdom are those who know how to serve.

Jesus is well aware of the desire to dominate others that many hearts harbor: “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.” There are people who think that to be great one has to impose oneself on others, control their lives, squeeze out everything they can give while thinking only of one’s own benefit. These people rise to the top for a while, but over time they end up being rejected by others.

A spirit of service is what truly makes our heart great. Authentic human growth comes by helping others grow, not by dominating their lives. The desire for service opens up infinite horizons for us. Everyone we meet presents us with an opportunity to serve them, no matter in how small a way. A person eager to serve influences many people's lives and makes a difference in them. They are magnanimous persons, because they go out of their way to help others.

The Church's history is marked by saints who knew how to serve. We can think of the figure of Saint Lawrence the martyr, caring for the poor Christians in Rome; Saint Martin de Porres, known as "Fray Escoba" (Friar Broom), who served with a fraternal spirit those who were considered the least; and more recently, Saint Teresa of Calcutta,

who cared for the sick and abandoned in India.

Saint Josemaría encourages us to contemplate how Christ reigns by serving: “If we let Christ reign in our soul, we will not become authoritarian. Rather we will serve everyone. How I like that word: service! To serve my King and, through him, all those who have been redeemed by his Blood” (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 182). This is the marvelous mission of Christians: to serve all souls, with a great heart.