

# Connecting With the Sunday Readings

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Seating arrangements are an important part of social engineering. When we host a party, after deciding the menu of food and drink, we turn our attention to where our guests will sit and who will be next to whom. Depending on who is there and where they sit, places can become important to people.

In the time of Jesus, where one sat at the table indicated one's status. Jesus uses this arranging more than once to say that he, and those who want to follow him, should take the lower seats. In fact, they are to prefer the role of servant rather than seek to be guest of honor. Today's Gospel reading creates an occasion for Jesus to once again reverse conventional thinking and ways of acting.

## A Gospel Word for the Home

Mark 10:35-45

James and John decided to risk asking a question that showed what they were thinking. They were thinking ahead. But they were thinking about what reward they might receive later on when Jesus came back in glory!

They had not yet absorbed Jesus' message of discipleship. They want to be first. They want to be seen as important. Jesus gently corrects them. And he uses the occasion to again teach that his way was not one of honor and prestige but one of service, and yes, even suffering.

We often feel torn between two powerful forces. One force pulls us in the direction of self-importance, ruling over others and getting to a place of honor. The other draws us downward in the direction of serving others by offering our time and energy to make life a little better for them even when it costs us something or we just do not want to do it. Jesus' message is consistent. To be his followers' one must opt for the force of service. In God's eyes the last will be first.

### Thought for the Week

We live in a world that worships its heroes. That's the way it is in the world of politics, business, sports, and entertainment. It's often difficult for these heroes to live a normal life and at times they make great effort to escape the worshipping crowds by hiring private jets and personal bodyguards to protect them.

In contrast to this high living, we settle for our ordinary life where we receive little in the way of public attention or applause. We muddle along, day after day, doing our chores, taking care of our kids and collapsing in bed, exhausted from the work of the day. What a life, we think. Then we turn on the TV to see what celebrity is being interviewed tonight and it is possible to become just a little envious.

If that happens, think about the last line of the Gospel where Jesus says he came not to be served but to serve and give his life for others. Yes, that's what **we** are **about**.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

## Parent Survival

This Gospel speaks directly to the lives of ordinary parents. We have chosen to serve rather than to be served; mostly, we smile, because who would do the work if we didn't? Especially when our children are small, they play mostly the role of being a guest in our families. While it may look like we parents are in charge, we know what's really going on. And hopefully, we are able to find joy in our lives.

Once again, it depends largely on how we look at it. Much of our culture frowns on those who break the social code by not following the correct protocol. We are told to be assertive, expressive, and grab for all that we can of life's bounty. Perhaps, one of the most insidious maxims ever expressed was the one saying that we can have it all! This leads us on a quest to grab all the gusto we can and not be satisfied until we do. Look at all those happy and beautiful people using, or eating, or drinking product "X." That's what I want! Today's Gospel reading begs the question: Do you want it? Is that the secret for achieving true happiness?

## Car or Meal Talk

Find a commercial on TV that offers the good life and discuss whether it delivers what it promises.

## One-Line Prayer

God the Father, thank you for doing all you do for us each day. Amen.