

DEACON JOHN HALL'S HOMILY

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, September 19, 2021

In our Second Reading from the Letter of James, a truly wise person is described: peaceful, unwavering, gentle, understanding, humble, merciful, sincere . . . Are you thinking of someone that fits that description? It is a blessing to know and admire someone like that.

And that description fits with the idea of greatness that Jesus calls us to be . . . someone who always puts others first. That is true greatness in the Kingdom of God.

Yet, that is not the kind of greatness that our culture promotes, nor was it, in the culture in which Jesus and his apostles lived. I find myself sympathizing with the apostles who apparently continued to struggle to understand what 'greatness' in the kingdom of God meant. The apostles lived under and were subject to the harsh forces of Roman authorities with a king who ruled with forceful power. But then they heard Jesus teach about a higher source of power. Jesus offered the oppressed people hope with his vision of a kingdom in which freedom, love and equality was the norm. They watched Jesus defend himself against the accusations of the Scribes and Pharisees. When Jesus spoke of a new and heavenly Jerusalem, they surely imagined enormous possibilities! No wonder they were confused when Jesus, for the second time, spoke of his arrest, death, and resurrection. They watched Jesus feed over 5,000 men, he settled the storms at sea, he cured the deaf man and restored vision to the blind man. And now he spoke of being handed over to the authorities? No way, Jesus! We are going to see this kingdom of God idea all the way to the end, and then we will be the greatest. The apostles thought greatness was found in power and control - that same kind of power and control under which they lived.

Are we, 2,000 years later, any better at understanding true greatness? I think we all know the answer. Too many of us, myself included, want to be our own authority with our own kingdom, and no one is going to tell me what to do . . . no one is going to take away my freedom to do what I want!

That kind of freedom, individualism and independence has nothing to do with being great in the kingdom of God. Being great in the kingdom of God is freely choosing to "... be the last of all and the servant of all." That is greatness in the kingdom of God!

For five more Sundays, we are going to hear from Mark's Gospel on what it takes to be a disciple of Jesus. And then Mark will deliver Jesus' greatest commandment: Love God with all your heart, mind, and soul . . . and love your neighbor as yourself.

It is not easy to be great in the kingdom of God, but I see tremendous examples of greatness sitting right in front of me. The sacrifices you make for your children, how you love your spouses and your care for our elders, the sick and the poor, your generosity with your treasure – our parish has exceeded its CASA goal by almost 30% ! And to see our school addition take shape - all signs of how you are putting the needs of others first. Thank you!

Recall the person I asked you to think of at the beginning of this homily: someone who is peaceful, unwavering, gentle, understanding, humble, merciful, sincere. Again, what a gift it is to know and admire someone like that. But an even greater gift, is to be that person for others.