

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time – B
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Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
21 October 2018

Isaiah 53:10-11
Psalm 33
Hebrews 4:14-16
(Mark 10:45) Mark 10:35-45

A True Servant

In his Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul identified seven *charisms* or *gifts* that are given to us as the Body of Christ: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, administration, and mercy.¹ Each of us is given at least one of these spiritual gifts.² And the important thing for us to know about these gifts is that they're not a gift for *us*. They're not like a birthday gift, which is meant for us to keep and enjoy for ourselves. These spiritual gifts are different because they are given to us so that *we* can give them to *others*.³

In today's Gospel, Jesus' encounter with James and John – and, subsequently, with all Twelve of the Apostles – demonstrates what the gift of Service should look like. And, in teaching about Service, Jesus presents a framework for – or a way of living out – *all* the spiritual gifts. No matter what our particular gift is, we can all learn something from the gift of Service. We can all learn how to better put our individual gifts into service for the whole community, rather than taking our gifts and seeking our own benefit or advantage from them.

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When I think of the gift of Service, I think first of my Grandma Brick. God gave her the gift of Service, and she gave that gift to our family. Maybe you know someone like her in your own family or amongst your friends. She was always serving others: cleaning, cooking, organizing, *taking care of and serving everyone else*. So busy serving others that she rarely took time for herself. Her long lifetime of living out and giving the gift of Service was a great

inspiration and lesson for me and all my family, of how we can always strive to better serve one another.

But it was in the last few years of her life that she taught me a very particular and important lesson about Service. You see, my Grandma was very detailed, regimented, and maybe even obsessive about cleaning. Not just cleaning everything seen, but even cleaning the unseen: on top of the cupboards; behind the refrigerator and stove; under the couch and furniture; using a toothpick to clean out the tracks of the sliding glass door (which I didn't even know needed to be done). All the things that are good to clean and need to be cleaned, but I don't think occur to most of on a regular basis – at least not to me. I have to say, it wasn't that she was a germaphobe. She did this because she was a good steward and very frugal. She wanted to keep everything in good condition so that it would last a long time.

Well, in the latter years of her life, she still had the motivation, but was losing the physical ability to keep cleaning things the way she would have liked. It was very frustrating for her. One time, when I was visiting her, she asked me to help her clean some things that she previously would have cleaned herself. She couldn't physically do it anymore, so she needed me to be her arms and her hands and her height to get to all those hard to reach spots.

So, I was feeling pretty good about myself. Now was my chance to show my love and gratitude by serving *her*. And as we started cleaning, she started giving me instructions on each step of the way. Very detailed instructions. And I started to get a little frustrated. Thinking to myself thoughts like: "I know how to clean... Why is she bossing me around so much?... The way I want to do it is good enough... If she wants me to clean this for her, then she just needs to let me do it *my way!*"

Whoa! Do it *my way*?! Is my gift of Service to her on *my own* terms? What kind of a *gift* is that?! Now, if it were years earlier, and I was just being a stubborn kid, I could have been (and probably was many times) difficult and refused to help. That wouldn't have been good, but at least she could have done the job herself without my gift of Service and cooperation.

But now? I realized that if I'm unwilling to offer my gift of Service in this moment, then the cleaning simply *won't* happen. She *can't* clean it herself anymore. The only way it will get done the way *she* wants is if *I* follow her instructions.

So, I had a choice: I could try to convince her that the way *I* want to Serve is good enough (and, by the way, she should be grateful for it). Or I could stop trying to convince her of the way *I* wanted to do it. And I could become a *True Servant*.

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In reflecting on today's Gospel, Bishop Mueggenborg teaches us: "Faith is always distorted when we try to convince God to do what we want rather than seeking God's will for our lives."⁴ James' and John's faith was distorted when they were trying to convince Jesus to give them power, honor, and glory through their Service as Apostles.⁵ My faith was distorted when I was trying to convince my Grandma to accept my limited gift of Service. Jesus came to teach the Apostles – to teach all of us – that the only way to true greatness in this life and in the Kingdom of Heaven is through the gift of Service.⁶

Saint Athanasius said: "God became human, that we might become God."⁷ What this means is that Jesus came to show us not only how to be good humans, but how we humans can share in the Divine Life and Love of the Holy Trinity.

This Divine Life is given to us primarily through the grace of the Sacraments. In our Baptism, we are reborn as sons and daughters of God. In Reconciliation, our family relationship

to God and one another is repaired and healed. In Anointing of the Sick, we are strengthened in our faith and hope in God's plan to heal and redeem us. And in the Eucharist, God's Divine Body and Blood become part of our human bodies – and our lives are transformed and strengthened to be more and more like God's Divine Life.⁸

Because of Jesus' example of Service to our brothers and sisters; because Jesus remains with us in His Word and Sacraments⁹; we are able to live out the Divine Life in our human lives. No matter what our particular gifts are, when we offer our gifts to the community as a *True Servant*, then we know we are being great; then we know that we are sharing in the Divine Life. When we are a *True Servant*, then we know we are being like God!

¹ Romans 12:6-8: "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."

Also see *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 2004: "Among the special graces ought to be mentioned the *graces of state* that accompany the exercise of the responsibilities of the Christian life and of the ministries within the Church:..."

² See 1 Peter 4:10: "As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace."

Also see 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, especially 12:7: "To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit."

³ From Bible Footnotes at usccb.org/bible/romans/12 (Romans 12:6): "Everyone has some gift that can be used for the benefit of the community. When the instruction on justification through faith is correctly grasped, the possessor of a gift will understand that it is not an instrument of self-aggrandizement. Possession of a gift is not an index to quality of faith. Rather, the gift is a challenge to faithful use."

⁴ Bishop Daniel H. Mueggenborg, *Come Follow Me: Discipleship Reflections on the Sunday Gospel Readings for Liturgical Year B* (2017), 298.

Also see *Roman Missal* Collect for Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (*Opening Prayer for today's Mass*): "Almighty ever-living God, grant that we may always conform our will to yours and serve your majesty in sincerity of heart."

⁵ Mark 10:37

⁶ Mark 10:42-45

Also see Isaiah 53:11: "My servant, the just one, shall justify the many..."

⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296 – 373)

On the Incarnation of the Word 54.3: "For He was made man that we might be made God; and He manifested Himself by a body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father; and He endured the insolence of men that we might inherit immortality."

Four Discourses Against the Arians, 1.39: "Therefore He was not man, and then became God, but He was God, and then became man, and that to deify us."

Four Discourses Against the Arians, 3.34: "For if you object to my being rid of that corruption which is by nature, see that you object not to God's Word having taken my form of servitude; for as the Lord, putting on the body, became man, so we men are deified by the Word as being taken to Him through His flesh, and henceforward inherit life 'everlasting.'"

⁸ See CCC 1392: “What material food produces in our bodily life, Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life. Communion with the flesh of the risen Christ, a flesh ‘given life and giving life through the Holy Spirit,’ preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at Baptism. This growth in Christian life needs the nourishment of Eucharistic Communion, the bread for our pilgrimage until the moment of death, when it will be given to us as viaticum.”

Also see Urban IV, *Transiturus* (1264) (tr. Fr. James T. O’Connor (1988)): “Eating wounded us, and eating healed us. Thus the Saviour says, My Flesh is real food. This bread is taken but truly not consumed, because it is not transformed into the eater. Rather, if it is worthily received, the recipient is conformed to it.”

Also see *Roman Missal* Prayer after Communion for Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time: “Grant us, almighty God, that we may be refreshed and nourished by the Sacrament which we have received, so as to be transformed into what we consume. Through Christ our Lord.”

⁹ See *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7