

5th Sunday in Lent 3/21/21
Mark 10:32-45 B

“TEACHER, WE WANT YOU TO DO FOR US WHATEVER WE ASK OF YOU...GRANT US TO SIT, ONE AT YOUR RIGHT HAND AND ONE AT YOUR LEFT IN YOUR GLORY.”

Perhaps, you have heard of the ancient Greek legend of Narcissus. He was the son of a river god. A seer told his mother that her son must never see his reflection if he was to mature into manhood. For that reason, everything that reflected an image, such as metal, was removed from her son's presence. But one day, Narcissus found a spring that formed a pool filled with crystal-clear water. As he stooped down to take a drink from the pool, he saw his reflection on the surface of the water. He fell desperately in love with himself, and seeking to embrace himself, fell into the water and drowned.

You may not be all that familiar with the legend of Narcissus. But, you may have heard his name because we use it to describe those who are helplessly self-centered and self-absorbed. In fact, narcissism is now identified and catalogued as an official personality disorder by medical professionals.

In a broader sense, we use narcissism to describe one of the great maladies of our 21st century American culture. Ours is a narcissistic culture. We are self-centered and self-absorbed. A great book, entitled “The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in an age of entitlement,” gave us many examples of how our culture has turned in on itself. I quote:

On a reality TV show, a girl planning her Sweet Sixteen party wants a major road blocked off so a marching band can precede her grand entrance on a red carpet. Five times as many Americans undergo plastic surgery and cosmetic procedures as ten years ago, and ordinary people hire fake paparazzi to follow them around to make

them look famous. High school students physically attack classmates and post YouTube videos of the beatings to get attention. And for the past several years, Americans have been buying McMansions and expensive cars on credit they can't afford.

None of this should surprise us. God told us long ago, through the Apostle Paul,

that in the last times there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to the parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Tim 3).

We see it in James and John. They wanted glory. Look at their words, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You ... Grant us to sit, one at Your right hand and one at Your left in Your glory."

James and John, in asking for seats of honor in Jesus' kingdom, show the essential selfishness of our fallen nature. The Evangelist Mark tells us that they are not by any means unique in their ambition. In fact, the other disciples were angry when James and John asked for the seats of glory in the kingdom. We can only wonder – were the rest of the disciples angry with the two brothers because they should have never asked Jesus for such a selfish request? Or, were they angry because they failed to ask for the seats of glory before James and John?

We dare not point the proverbial finger of pride or fail to see ourselves in James and John. We are just as self-absorbed. We want glory as much as they did. This is why you want your child to start on the sports team, so someone else's kid can sit on the bench. You want to win every argument with your spouse; you can't even admit it when you are wrong. You love it when the boss chews out your co-worker at work. You

delight when your crop flourishes into a bumper crop at harvest and your neighbor's crop is devastated by hail. Narcissism is alive and well, in your sinful flesh, Dear Child of God.

But, the Good News of the Gospel is that there was no Narcissism in Jesus. He was not self-centered and self-absorbed. He was focused on you. Look at His words, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant ... For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

Jesus was your servant. He served you by taking your self-centeredness, your self-absorption; your selfishness, your pride, your arrogance, your conceit, your love of pleasure upon Himself. And for all those sins, the Son of Man was delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes. He was condemned to death and delivered over to the Gentiles. He was mocked and spit upon, flogged and killed by being nailed to the cross. He gave His life as a ransom for you.

And just as Jesus said would happen, "After three days He will rise." Jesus rose that blessed 3rd day and His resurrection proves that God the Father accepted Christ's sacrifice for the reconciliation of the world. "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more," God promises. God has forgiven your iniquity and remembers your sin no more, Dear Child of God, because all of your sin – each sin of thought, word, and deed – is gone in the blood of Jesus.

JESUS HAS SERVED YOU SO THAT YOU MAY SERVE. Jesus serves your neighbor through you. Jesus says it this way in our lesson, "But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all." In the new birth of our baptism, God the Holy Spirit makes us a new creation so that we die to

all sin and self-centeredness and selfishness and we rise to be a “little Christ” to our neighbor. Yes, as a sinner with the flesh clinging tightly to us, this can be a challenge; and in fact, a difficult burden. But we are not alone. Jesus is with us. Through His Word and His true Body and Blood, Jesus feeds the new creation He has made us in our baptism, so that we daily die to sin and selfishness to serve our neighbor as Christ has served us.

Paul says it this way in the book of Philippians,

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Ph 2).

God, in His infinite wisdom, has made us new in Christ to do good works in the vocations He has called us to. In those vocations, we humbly serve our neighbor. After all, God doesn't need our good works, but our neighbor does. This is why the husband and father, as priest of his household, turns off the TV to pray with his family and teach his children the Catechism. This is why the tired mother sacrifices her own rest to get up at 3:00 am to soothe the crying infant. The teenager, perhaps not always willing, takes out the garbage. The child puts away their toys, because their parents told them to. The employee, when assigned a task by their supervisor, completes that task without grumbling or complaining, thus earning their wages in a God-pleasing manner.

In this season of Lent, as we learn again what it means to carry the cross, see that real greatness in the kingdom of God is service – humble

and willing service to our neighbor in their needs, serving them as Christ has served us.