

25th Sunday per Annum - B
Wisdom 2:12, 17-20;
James 3:16-4:3;
Mark 9:30-37
Little Flower - 9/23/18

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel, Jesus prophesied his death and resurrection, a death and resurrection that was already prophesied in today's reading from the Book of Wisdom. In the reading from Wisdom, the wicked said, "*For if the just one be the son of God, he will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes.*"

Both Pope Francis and Cardinal Tobin have often said that our God is a God of surprises. God's thoughts are not our thoughts; God's ways are not our ways. The Jews of the Old Testament and Jesus' disciples would never have expected God to allow the just one to suffer or Jesus to die on the cross. Jesus himself prayed to be delivered from death on the cross during his agony in the garden: "*Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will*" [Mk. 14:36].

God, however, surprised them. Jesus suffered and died on the cross, but God raised him glorious and triumphant from the dead. By rising from the dead, Jesus overcame sin, suffering, sickness, and even death itself not only for himself but also for us. In the garden, Jesus was praying for his life, and God gave him a new, richer, and unending life.

The rest of today's Gospel makes it even more clear that the disciples did not have a clue about what Jesus was talking about when he prophesied his suffering and death because they were arguing who was the greatest among them. Jesus responded, "*If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.*" In this verse, Jesus connects leadership and service. Jesus is saying that authentic leaders must be servants. Jesus himself offered the best example of servant leadership at the Last Supper when he washed the feet of his disciples and asked them to do the same.

Servant leadership has two dimensions. The first dimension of servant leadership is humble service, i.e., the willingness to do what needs to be done. The second dimension of servant leadership is to call forth the best in others. It is to help them become the-best-version-of-themselves. It is to help them let their light shine before others. Servant leaders make their own the words of John the Baptist, "*He must increase; I must decrease*" [Jn. 3:30]. As disciples of Jesus, all of us are called to become servant leaders.

Pope Francis and many others have suggested that the multiple crises in our church today are due to clericalism, which is the polar opposite of servant leadership. Cardinal Cupich recently argued that the whole church needs to confront attitudes of power, privilege, and entitlement that characterize many of the ordained. Pope Francis has often said that priests must take on the smell of the sheep.

However, for the culture of the Church to change, all Catholics will have to accept the responsibility of being servant leaders within the Church. In my very first Sunday homily at Little Flower, I said, "I want you to know that I believe this parish is your parish." What I am trying to say is that if the Church wants to end clericalism, it has to give more real leadership and authority to non-priests. Priests have to be willing to let go of their clericalism; the laity must be willing to take on roles of leadership.

My brothers and sisters, today's Gospel ends with Jesus putting his arm around a child and saying, "*Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the one who sent me.*" In this passage, Jesus identifies himself with the children. As I said in my homily a few weeks ago, "our children and young people need to be respected, cherished, loved, and protected both in the Church and in society." They are not only the future of our Church; they are our present.