

September 2021

**“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” (Mk 9:35)**

The disciples were having a lively discussion among themselves as they traveled with Jesus to Capernaum. When Jesus asked them what they were talking about, however, they did not dare answer him, perhaps because they were ashamed. In fact, they were trying to establish who was the greatest among them.

Jesus had spoken several times about his mysterious impending suffering, but for Peter and the others, it was too difficult to understand and accept.

It would only be after experiencing Jesus' death and resurrection that they would discover who he really is: the Son of God, who gives his life out of love.

That is why, to help them truly be his disciples, Jesus called them to come and sit down close to him, as he revealed the true nature of “evangelical primacy.”

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Jesus had confidence in the disciples, despite their fragility and fears. He called them to follow him and to share his mission to serve everyone.

Paul's exhortation to the Christians in Philippi comes to mind: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:3-5).

Christians were called to serve, not so much as slaves forced into their work, but as a free people who would generously offer their skills and strength. They were to give of themselves not only for the benefit of a specific group or party, but for all those who needed help, without exception and without prejudice.

This is also a call for us today to have open hearts and minds, recognize and care for the needs of others, and be active in building relationships that are truly human. It is an invitation to put our talents to good use for the common good and, despite our failures, start anew each day. It is a call to put ourselves in the last place and together to keep striving toward a future of universal fraternity.

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Focolare founder Chiara Lubich, commenting on this Gospel passage in September 1985, suggested ways we could put it into practice. “There are countless opportunities in everyday life when we, like Jesus, can choose to take the last place. If we have been asked to take the lead in completing an important task, let us not feel that we are ‘somebody’— let us not give way to pride and arrogance.

“Instead, let us remember that the most important thing is to love our neighbor. Let us take advantage of the new situation to serve our neighbor better, without forgetting seemingly insignificant things such as nourishing personal relationships, doing simple household jobs, helping our parents, keeping peace and harmony in the family and educating children ...

“Yes, whatever happens, let us remember that Christianity means to love and to have a preferential love for the least among us. If we live like this, we will continue to build up the kingdom of God on earth.

“Moreover, Jesus promised that if we do this, all the rest will be given to us too — health and material goods in abundance ... to be shared with others. If we do this, we become the arms of God’s providence for so many people.”

The protection of our common home, a strong theme in Christian witness for many years, is a particularly timely form of service that we can share with people around the world. For an increasing number of churches, the month of September opens with the celebration of the Season of Creation, which continues until October 4, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation.

On one such occasion in the past, the Taizé community proposed this prayer: “God of love, as we remain in your presence, make us capable of grasping the infinite beauty of what you have created, of all that comes from you, of your inexhaustible compassion. Increase our attention toward others and toward all creation. Teach us to discover the value of everything and make us bearers of peace in the human family.”

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