

## Service and Power

Last Saturday I attended a meeting for current and prospective deacons. As you can expect the overall theme was diakonia, service, and how that is worked out in practice. The important message we were left with was that service is the calling not only of those ordained deacon but of all baptized Christians. Deacons are not there to perform service for the Church just on their own but also to encourage and support the work of service of the whole Church.

The model is of course that of our Lord himself. As Jesus states in our reading just now (Mark 10.32-45): “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve”,

The context for our reading, which is part of the Gospel for this coming Sunday, is the request by the brothers James and John to sit at Jesus’ right and left in his glory. They want the highest status after their Lord himself. Not surprisingly this angers the other disciples. But rather than castigating James and John Jesus points out that they do not appreciate the full implications of what they are asking for. True discipleship is costly and sacrificial. It brings with it not status but instead requires an attitude and practice of service.

Jesus reminds disciples of rulers who are motivated primarily by the power they wield over others. That power is not always benevolent. It may be exercised for the ruler’s own ends, it may be ambitious and lacking in compassion and concern for their subjects.

Sadly nothing has changed in that respect. We can think of many such people in power in our own world today. Many regimes have become more extreme, either to the right or to the left. And what both those extremes on the political spectrum share is a subservience of the individual to the state, or in practice to the wishes of the ruling elite.

Service as taught by Jesus is the opposite of all that. Service requires selflessness, concern for others before oneself. It requires humility, compassion, respect for others, love in the full Christian sense.

If all leaders followed that pattern then the world would be a far better and more peaceful place. For wars and conflicts so often arise from the desire to dominate others, to stifle dissent, to exercise one’s will or ideology over others. And the effects of that can be disastrous. So often they lead to terrible pain and suffering.

Jesus encountered that in his earthly life, and he paid the ultimate price: death on a cross. But his death and resurrection give us the hope that the values of God’s kingdom will ultimately prevail: love, mercy, forgiveness and service.

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