

To Serve or Be Served?

Scripture Background

This information isn't meant to be read aloud, but as background for the leader. If helpful, share some of it in conversation with the group.

The first and second readings today use vocabulary, images, and references that are unfamiliar to many of us in the 21st century but would have been perfectly clear to our Jewish and early Christian ancestors. In Jewish tradition, priests offered animal sacrifices to make up for people's guilt. The reading from Isaiah imagines a human as the sacrificial victim who will atone for the sins of all. Christians later came to equate Jesus with this victim. The Letter to the Hebrews envisions Jesus as the high priest who offers the sacrifice for each of us.

Opening Prayer

Pray the following aloud together, beginning with the Sign of the Cross:

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Ever faithful God, may the words of scripture enlighten our minds, enliven our hearts, and strengthen us to go out and do your will.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Gospel Reading: Mark 10:35-45

Ask someone to read this passage aloud, then pause for a minute of silence.

Ask: What struck you about this reading or the liturgy this week?

Allow for sharing. Move on to the next section once the sharing has died down.

Reflections on the Reading

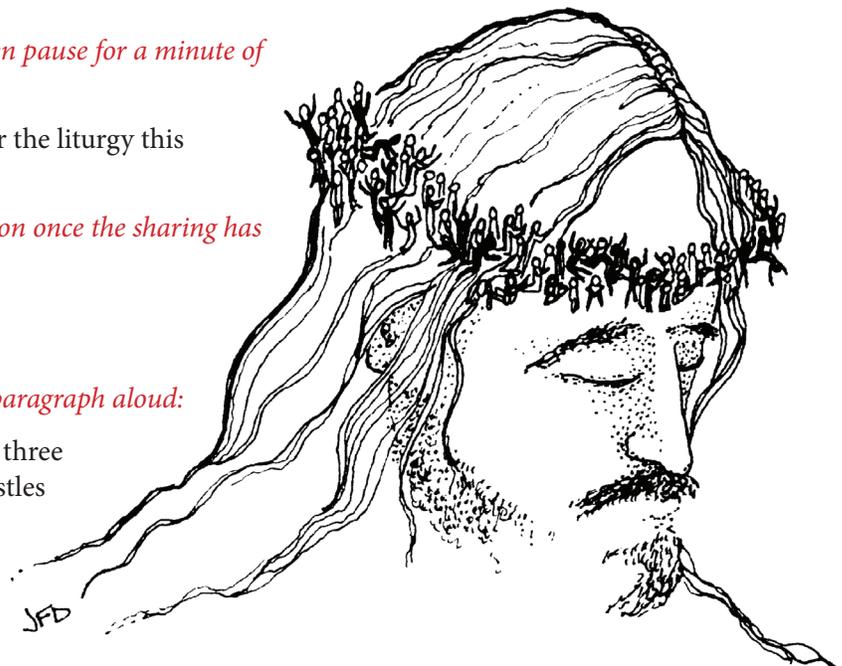
Invite each person in the circle to read one paragraph aloud:

Mark's Gospel, more than any of the other three Gospels, paints a picture of the twelve apostles as a bumbling, immature group that keeps getting things wrong, misunderstanding their teacher, and arguing amongst themselves. They especially don't seem to want to hear Jesus' predictions about

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29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

- ▶ Isaiah 53:10-11 - The suffering servant
- ▶ Hebrews 4:14-16 - Jesus, compassionate high priest
- ▶ Mark 10:35-45 - Ambition of James and John



his suffering and death, because all three times when he speaks of it, they respond with a complete lack of sensitivity.

The passage today follows immediately after Jesus' third prediction of his upcoming death. How do the disciples respond? James and John change the subject and ask for a special favor—they each want a position of honor when Jesus comes into his glory.

As usual, Jesus turns their thinking upside down. Now is not the time to talk about glory, he seems to say. Now is the time to be realistic about how the world treats people who speak up for justice and work for peace. The Old Testament was clear that prophets who spoke truth to power were often killed, and nothing has changed since that time. Jesus realizes his apostles will face similar opposition, and he asks them if they are willing to risk such suffering. As readers, we get the feeling James and John don't know what they are committing themselves to when they say they can drink the same cup as Jesus. They want to get to the glory.

It is not surprising that the other disciples get upset with James and John's power-grab, and their anger leads to yet another lesson by Jesus about the alternative nature of God's kingdom. Jesus raises up the position of lowly servants and demotes the rulers. He puts the slave first and the first last. He is clear that rather than racing to the top, the apostles should be humbling themselves to serve. Jesus will continue to teach by example, even to the point of offering his life in service to all.

Questions for Discussion

Read each question aloud, one at a time, followed by time for sharing.

- ① If you were James and John and could ask Jesus to do something for you, what would it be?
- ② Have you been or are you in a “race to the top” in some particular area of your life? How does it leave you feeling?
- ③ In what area of your life are you called to serve more rather than be served?

Closing Prayer

Pray the following aloud together:

Lord, thank you for all the gifts you have given us.

May we use them to continue to praise your name.

Amen.