

**Twenty-Fifth Sunday Ordinary Time– Year B**

**September 23, 2018**

**Christ the Good Shepherd, ORCC**

**Reflection by Father Charles Blanchard**

First Reading: Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

Psalm: 54: 3-4, 5, 6-8 (6b)

Second Reading: James 3:16–4:3

Gospel: Mark 9:30-37

Welcome to Christ the Good Shepherd. It's exciting to see so many people of divergent backgrounds who have decided to come here; to pray; to sing; and to affirm common ground. A common ground created out of Catholic ritual, tradition and history, and yet applied, in a new and creative way where all are welcome to hear God's Word and feast at this table where there is no partiality.

Hurricane Florence dumped a large amount of rain on the South last week. The damage is only now being assessed so that repair work can begin. I'm sure as time goes on we will start to hear of some incredible stories of service and heroism, of individuals coming to the help of someone despite the personal risk involved.

In reflecting on all of these natural occurrences, two stories of remarkable courage and resilience come to mind.

Imagine being torn out of your loving mother's arms at age eight. Next thing you know, you're alone, crammed onto a train full of people headed for another city — one you barely know. You think that at least your aunt and uncle, whom you've met a handful of times before, will be waiting for you upon your arrival.

But instead, you're greeted only by a couple of threatening teenagers in uniform who drop you off at a dormitory, where you join a ragtag group of other lost children. When you set foot in the small, dirty room that will be your home for the next ten years, you discover your four year-old sister lying on the bare concrete floor, sobbing. She desperately needs your tender care.

In one day, you've not only lost your mother, you've become one yourself; you've become a source of courage and resilience yourself.

This is no nightmare. It is just one small part of the true story of Ping Fu, told in her memoir, *Bend, Not Break – Flectar non Frangar*.

A second real-life example of courage and resilience stands here before our very eyes this day!

Let's move to Ferndale, Michigan. There's a young 23 year man from Senegal, West Africa. At the age of 13, he joined his sister by traveling to the United States. While here, he engaged the educational system; found the love of his life and married. Because of his marital love to a man, his sister disowned him.

Detached from the only family system known, he now faces ICE as his sister failed to provide promised, appropriate citizenship documentation. Because of his courage and resilience, this young man is here with us today.

This type of courage, resilience and selfless giving is to what Jesus is calling us to live out in our discipleship. The Gospel reading for today's liturgy, taken from St. Mark's account, reminds us that from the very beginning of his public ministry, Jesus has been forming Peter, Andrew, James and John as his disciples. Many others joined the group along the way. Step by step, they journeyed with Jesus, who taught them through his person, his words, his actions and interactions about what life is. Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God with the totality of his being.

In today's account, Jesus continues to form his followers. As he did in last week's Gospel passage (e.g., "Who do you say that I am"), he tells them that "the Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise." The evangelist adds that the disciples did not understand, "and they were afraid to question him." Perhaps they were afraid after Jesus' reaction to Peter in the previous account.

As they continue along the way, they begin to argue among themselves as to who was the most important. Hearing this, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all."

After sitting a young child in the middle of them, he adds, "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."

Jesus uses the child as an example because, in the mindset of that world, the child could offer nothing in return for the kindness or care given him or her.

Service to a child is selfless; the concern is not for one's self, but completely for the other. This is what it means to be "last of all."

My sisters and brothers, Christian discipleship entails such giving. This is indeed a challenge, for the call to discipleship goes on every single day. Sometimes heroic action might be needed, but more often it is the regular dying to self in the awareness and response to the needs of those around us.

- It can be as simple as offering a kind word to someone who looks like they're having a bad day;
- Disrupting your schedule to listen to someone;
- Helping a child with homework after a long day at work;
- Checking in on an aging parent;
- Reaching out to someone who is ostracized;
- Visiting someone who is homebound; or
- Mobilizing the necessary federal resources for someone who fears deportation.

My sisters and brothers, today, our readings call us to be resilient; to stand firm and harness courage in the face of challenges. Jesus reminds us that laying down our lives for the good of others – by being "last of all and the servant of all" – is the way you and I walk as disciples on the path of life.