

As we listen to today's Gospel Jesus is teaching his disciples about his impending persecution, how he will be handed over to the authorities and crucified. And last week what did we hear? Jesus spoke about the cross and the necessity of carrying the cross in order to be his disciple.

But what happens next? Jesus addresses the disciples and asks them what were you arguing about on the way? They were arguing which one amongst them was the greatest. Weren't they listening? After listening to a sermon about carrying the cross, about our Lord's impending death, how could they fail to understand? The most important and intimate followers of Jesus argue amongst themselves about who is the greatest. What were they thinking? How did they miss the point so completely?

The great French philosopher Simone Weil was once asked, "What are you searching for?"

She replied I'm searching for someone to be obedient to, because without obedience we inflate and grow silly even to ourselves.

Jesus in reprimanding his disciples calls them to that obedience, to be first you must be last of all and servant of all. When you lack obedience, you argue on the road about who is the greatest. You inflate and become silly even to yourselves. When you become servant to all then, then you are on the path to the Kingdom of God.

Now when I use the word obedience it is not in the sense that we become blind followers of the rules, or that we allow the tyrants and control freaks to hold sway over us but obedience is rooted in a careful listening to, in paying attention to, in being aware of, ourselves, of the other and above all, God.

Last week in the Gospel as Jesus spoke about the necessity of the disciples taking up their cross. "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it and whoever loses their life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it" Somehow in this, the act of following, in this act of fidelity, in this act of obedience we find life.

Like the Apostles in today's Gospel, we presume that we have life, we find life when we reach the top, when we are the greatest. Or to paraphrase the letter of James today we want something, we desire something that will fulfill us but we can't have it and so we hurt each other, step on each other; we create conflict and disputes to get what we want.

But what does it take to go in the opposite direction? To not desire greatness but to desire to be a servant; to not to use and abuse others but to welcome and embrace; to not step over the little ones but to welcome them in the name of Christ? What does it take?

Going back to that word obedience. For us, obedience strikes us as a loss of independence, of freedom, liberty. To submit is to lose; it is to lose our true self.

But for the Christian, obedience is not so much about submission but imitation. We want to resemble Jesus; we want to imitate him. And so obedience is about working on the imitation. We become servant of all so that we can become like Jesus; we become last of all so that we can become like Jesus. We welcome the little ones because in them we welcome Jesus and in Jesus we welcome the one who sent him; we welcome God.