

Homily - Year 29 B - October 17, 2021

“What are you doing next Saturday? Could you do me a little favor?” Even better is the expression, that I often use, “I have something only you can do!” Don’t you just hate being confronted with that type of question or statement!

Well, in today’s gospel we have something similar. James and John confront Jesus and ask him a question. They want to make sure they have honored positions in the kingdom, one at Jesus’ left and one at Jesus’ right.

Rooted in our biology or genes or somewhere is a competitive streak. Competition for resources, survival of the fittest, live and let die. The rewards go to the fastest, the nimblest, the smartest, the gun-slinging western cowboy hero, the super competitive business tycoon. We find that in just about any environment today.

Jesus quickly asks: “Are you ready to drink the cup?” Much too quickly, they respond in the affirmative, not knowing or understanding the ensuing consequences.

Jesus uses this opportunity to define leadership and importance. To be important in his eyes, to be a leader in life, Jesus points to service. In other words, leadership and importance are defined by living life the way he did.

We heard these words in the first reading: “through his suffering, my servant shall justify man, and their guilt he shall bear.”

How can we imitate that example of Jesus? Let me give you a few examples. We often hear about the saints and the great deeds they performed because of their faith. St. Kateri, a Mohawk, died to defend her practice of the faith; St. Mother Marianne Cope established the Franciscan sisters in Syracuse and later worked among the lepers in Molokai Hawaii.

Now, be careful. You may respond something like, well I could never do what they did. That’s true, but we can do what we can do. So many have the attitude that they are not as great as the canonized saints. So in saying to themselves “I can’t do what they did” they end up doing nothing.

Here’s another example, this time of a living saint. Go to YouTube some time and search for Gianna Jessen. She survived a late term abortion, against all odds, and, in her words, was “given the gift” of cerebral palsy. She continues to suffer and speaks out against abortion against lots of opposition. That is how she is working at becoming a member of the

kingdom of heaven, taking her life, once thought useless, and trying to change the hearts and minds of others.

Again, you may say that is heroic. It is. But, every time we let go of ourselves, we gain so much more. Mother Teresa said it quite nicely: “When you don’t have anything, then you have everything.”

James and John learned this lesson the hard way with a rebuke from Jesus. You may have to be a hero in some way other than the examples that I gave, but there are multiple opportunities: welcoming the stranger, not looking for the easy way out, respecting God’s creation.

So, when you are next asked: “Could you do me favor.” Your “yes” might go a long way up to the gates of the kingdom of heaven.