

Deacon Richard Ashburn  
Sunday, October 17, 2021  
29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

### “Mind your Ps and Qs”

Mind your Ps and Qs. I’ll repeat it again, as it will help us in remembering the important lessons Jesus was teaching His disciples, and us, in last week’s Gospel and today’s Gospel – Mind your Ps and Qs.

First, the Qs. Let’s recall last week’s Gospel involving the rich young man who inquires of Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. The young man poses a Q - a question – The same question we should be asking God each morning before we arise: “What must **I** do to inherit eternal life?” When Jesus answers the rich young man with “You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me,” the young man went away sad, for he had many **possessions** (possessions representing one of those pesky Ps).

Let’s now consider today’s Gospel reading, also from chapter 10 of Mark’s Gospel, which finds James and John coming to Jesus and saying “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” I don’t know about you, but I think that’s a rather bold position for James and John to adopt. After all, they claim to be disciples of the One they are acknowledging to be the Son of God. When asked by Jesus “What do you wish me to do for you?” they answer “Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left.” A pretty presumptuous request, I think you’d agree. This posturing for positions of **power** and **prestige** prompts an important Q, a question, from Jesus, namely “Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”

The response of the other ten disciples to the request of James and John is met, understandably, with indignation (i.e., anger). The sons of Zebedee appear to be seeking **prestige** and **power** (again, those pernicious Ps) in seeking positions at Christ’s right and left when He comes into His glory. The other ten

disciples sense an injustice in their belief that they are equally worthy to enjoy positions of honor next to their Master.

I believe there are several important messages we should derive from these Gospel passages. Firstly, we need to remember that we, members of the Body of Christ and children of God, are subordinate to God. Although made in the likeness of God and the highest of His creatures, we are just that, creatures of the Creator; we are not His equal. Unlike Christ, Who was at the same time both fully human and fully divine, we humans frequently yield to the temptation and sin that result from an inappropriate pursuit of **power, prestige, possessions, and pleasure** (four Ps the pondering of which is important). Jesus' human nature was subject to every temptation that each of us has ever encountered, yet His divine nature enabled Him to avoid sin (sin being anything that is contrary to the will of the Father).

Secondly, we learn from this Gospel the importance of humility and, by extension, obedience. Jesus tells James and John that seats at His right and left are not His to give, but rather they are reserved for those for whom His Father has prepared them. Although One with His Father, Jesus emerged from eternity into time, taking on flesh and a human nature to accomplish the mission issued by His Father, namely the redemption of mankind and victory over sin and death. Christ thus became a humble servant, a servant whose foreshadowing was noted in our first reading from Isaiah: "The Lord was pleased to crush him in infirmity....Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days; through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear." Today's second reading, from the Letter to the Hebrews, references our Savior's human nature: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin." Jesus, after the aforementioned encounter with James and John, summons all His disciples, and makes it clear that he who wishes to be great among them must be the servant of all. Jesus claims that He did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. The New Law, or New Covenant, that Christ made with mankind has as its foundation the ministry of service, first to God

and then to our fellow man and woman. Voluntary service by its very nature involves attention to the needs and desires of others, and likewise demonstrates an other-centeredness, or love, of another. Jesus' service to us is the perfect example of love, which is the wishing of the good of another, for the other.

So let's get back to our Ps and Qs. Each day, each of us should ask our Lord "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Another way of asking this is, "What is your will for me on this day?" And each day each of us should listen to Christ's response. In addition, each of us should pay attention to the question or questions God may be posing to us, and, after appropriate reflection, thoughtfully and prayerfully provide answers. Effective prayer is a two-way street – God may both tell us things and ask things of us. We've become what I call an I-I-I-me-me-me society, where oftentimes it becomes all about me as an individual or about me as a member of a group. We too often seek things for ourselves, mindless of the needs of others. Our zealous desire for those dangerous Ps, **power, prestige, possessions, and pleasures**, frequently become obstacles to our seeking and doing the will of God and being worthy servants to our neighbor.

As we prepare to celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the greatest gift of God to mankind, let us mind our Ps and Qs, each day asking the important questions "Lord, what is your will for me this day?" and avoiding the idolatry of **power, prestige, possessions, and pleasure** that can lead us away from Christ. It is in living thus that we can trust in our Lord's promise that we will inherit eternal life with Him. Much had been given to the rich young man, and from him much was expected. Sadly, he did not give his total trust to Jesus; he was unwilling to renounce his possessions, and he went away sad. Hopefully, he eventually experienced a change of heart, and followed Jesus. James and John learned and adopted the humility of their Master, becoming worthy servants despite experiencing extreme persecutions. Their devotion and service to God won them salvation and sainthood in the Kingdom of Heaven. May the reception of Jesus in this sacred meal fortify us and provide us the wisdom to ask the important questions

the answers to which will enable us to know and to do God's will. Thus we, too, may know salvation and inherit the eternal life promised by Jesus in union with His Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.