

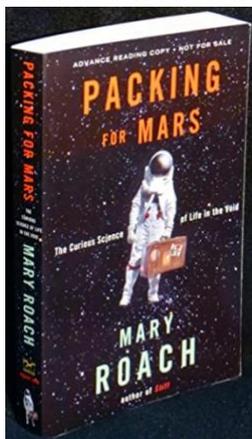
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle B, 10.17.21

Isaiah 53:10-11/Hebrews 4:14-16/Mark 10:35-45

SERVING ONE ANOTHER IN THE SPIRIT OF JESUS

I do believe in science... however, even though William Shatner (alias Captain Kirk from Star Trek) waxed eloquently about his dramatic 10-minute and 12-second space flight on Blue Origin last week, I do have some reservations about the newest fad of putting wealthy civilians in space. At the cost of millions of dollars for a ten-minute joy ride, I vote to use the money for other causes, like feeding the millions of hungry children in our world. Mary Roach is an author who writes about science with a sense of humor and earthiness. She asks the questions that we all wonder about - but are too embarrassed to ask out loud.



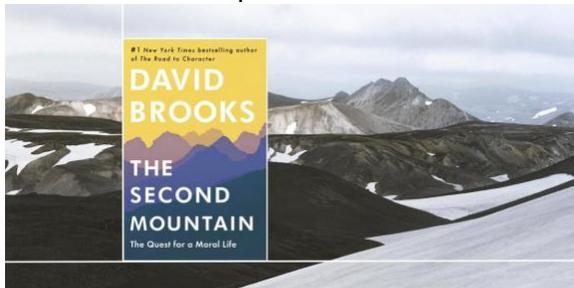
For example, in her book Packing for Mars, Roach explains the many challenges of sending human beings to the red planet and bringing them back safely to Earth. Such a mission would take a minimum of two years. The engineering challenges are easy, she writes. The biggest obstacle to the exploration of Mars are the human beings on board. Roach writes: *"To the rocket scientist, you are a problem. You are the most irritating piece of machinery he or she will ever have to deal with. You and your fluctuating metabolism, your puny memory, your frame that comes in a million different*

*configurations. You are unpredictable. You're inconstant. You take weeks to fix. The engineer must worry about the water and the oxygen and food you'll need in space, about how much extra fuel it will take to launch your shrimp cocktail and irradiated beef tacos. A solar cell or a thruster nozzle is stable and undemanding. It doesn't excrete or panic or fall in love with the mission commander. It has no ego." But **you**, on the other, hand . . .*

On our journey on the spaceship Earth, we share the same vulnerabilities, the same physical and psychological needs, the same hopes and dreams for ourselves and those we love. The realization that we are all of the same make-up - the physical substance of molecules that make up our bodies and the spirit of God's compassion in our hearts - that's the core of humility that Jesus calls his followers to embrace. The word "humility" comes from the same root as the word "humus" - "of the earth." Humility recognizes that we are all "of the earth," that we are all equal before God. Humility is the grace to let go of our pride, our ego and our wants in order to realize the common good we share. Would that all our citizens do what is best for the common good in working to defeat the coronavirus. Authentic faith is centered in such humility - humility that begins with valuing life as a gift from God, a gift we have received only through God's mysterious love, not through anything we have done to deserve it. Discipleship calls us to a sense of gratitude for what we have received from God and a commitment to servanthood, putting the lives God has given to us to the service of others, in imitation of his Christ.

A few years ago, David Brooks, popular writer for the New York Times,

published a book called The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life. In this book, he notes that everyone wants to be happy. In that pursuit, he believes that most people set off climbing the mountain of performance and success in hopes of finding the happiness they seek. He calls this the First Mountain. Folks who hike the trails of this mountain think that happiness will be found in making a mark on the world, cultivating their talents, and living their dreams. People on this mountain are concerned about their reputations. They tend to keep score and spend a lot of time wondering, “How am I measuring up?” They focus on things like a nice home, nice vacations, good food and good friends. We can hear echoes of the demand that our two disciples in today’s gospel make of Jesus: *Teacher, grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and one at your left. We want success and power.*



Unfortunately, these “First Mountain” folk when they reach the top of that mountain don’t find happiness, but disappointment. Eventually, they wind up back down in the valley and there, in the valley, they realize there’s another mountain to climb. A “Second Mountain.” Not the mountain of success and achievement, but the mountain of self-giving and self-sacrifice. Now and then, you come across people who are able to look ahead and manage to choose to climb the Second Mountain, the more important mountain, first. These people, the ones on the Second Mountain,

are the happy ones. They’re happy “from the inside out.”

This is how the author describes people who are climbing the Second Mountain: *They are kind, generous, delighted by small pleasures and are grateful for large ones. They aren’t perfect. They get exhausted and make errors in judgment. But they live for others, not for themselves. They know why they were put on this earth and derive deep satisfaction from doing what they’ve been called to do. Life isn’t easy for these people. They’ve taken on the burdens of others. Yet they have a serenity about them. They aren’t obsessed about themselves but have given themselves away.* This is the lesson that James and John in today’s gospel have to learn as Jesus invites them to drink of his cup, and to become first by being the servant of all.

On Saturday morning, family and friends who gathered for the memorial service for Kelly Gilson celebrated the life of a young woman who fit the description of David Brook’s “second mountain” climber and Jesus’ description of a faithful disciple who knows that to be great means to serve. Early in her life, Kelly, who grew up here in Lafayette and worshipped at St. Perpetua, learned what it means to give oneself away for the good of the neighbor. From an early age, Kelly’s goal was to help address social injustice and the problems associated with it. Her family and friends believe that she was placed on this earth to work with the less fortunate, particularly refugees impacted by war and conflict. When talking to others about her passion, her eyes would light up. As a teenager, she volunteered at the Bay Area Crisis Nursery, caring for infants and toddlers in difficult family situations, and she loved baking holiday pies for “A Friendly Manor,” the women’s shelter in

Oakland that our parish has supported for decades. By the age of twenty-three, Kelly had studied and volunteered in third world countries from Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras, to Ghana in Africa, to Cambodia and Lebanon. In each country she helped local communities in their struggle for a better life, especially children whose plight affected her so deeply. Although she died at the age of twenty-six, Kelly left a mark on the lives of those she touched with her courage and compassion.



We don't have to look too far from our own backyard to see countless examples of people – in our own families, in our own community, in the pew next to you -- who take Jesus at his word to put themselves and their skills at the service of those in need, of the suffering, of the victims of indifference and injustice. Only in imitating the servanthood of Christ do we experience the true depth of our faith. In our gospel, the two disciples, James and John, preface their question to Jesus with a demand: *Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.* Jesus responds simply and genuinely:

What do you wish me to do for you? Dare we find the courage as humble servants and disciples of Christ to make Jesus' question our own as we face our neighbor and our world: What do you wish me to do for you?



John Kasper, OSFS