



October 17, 2021

Twenty-Ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time

*Jesus said to them "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them...
But it shall not be so among you." Mark 10:42-43*

Dear Friends;

Much of suffering and what ails us as a society is related to the mentality of domination, that is "power over," or as Jesus says it "lording over" others. In contrast Jesus models a loving self-giving alternative to domination. Jesus exercises "power with" others not over others.

Domination is a relationship that does not work the same in both directions. One commands, the other obeys. One shows respect, the other receives it but does not return it. One is accountable to the other, while the other is not accountable to anyone. The one gains privileges and position, while the other is excluded.

We are all familiar with domination. We see it in the way decisions are made in families; the way orders are given at work; the way social life is structured by gender, race, and wealth; it's the way industry or professions relate to their competitors; it's the way the market treats consumers; or government bureaucracies function; it's the way the church claims special status for itself and the clergy. So much of history consists of people protecting themselves and what they think is theirs by dominating the other with a gun, or a flag or the cloak of racial, or class or gender privilege and superiority.

Jesus' life on earth was decidedly downwardly mobile path. He did not come as a prince holding power, riches, and every kind of privilege. He did not let people call him by royal titles such as Son of God or Messiah. He chose a path of humble service that led to suffering, humiliation and death on a cross. But in response God raised him up to a transformed life and glory. This is why the early Church identified Jesus with the figure of the suffering servant in the prophet Isaiah, as we read in our first reading. *"...through his suffering, my servant shall justify many..."*

Too many Christians have a pagan image of God. They see God as the warrior super-hero who crushes his enemies. We made God into an emperor. And we forget Jesus who said he came as servant. We forget the naked self-emptying Jesus on the cross. We forget that in Jesus we see God as the vulnerable, relational one who accompanies us and all creation as a friend. In Jesus we see one who does not run from suffering or things that break his heart. Jesus does not calculate what he can gain from a situation. Rather he seeks to give his life away that others might live fully.

Jesus is not about a power that dominates. Rather Jesus brings a power that enables us to cultivate life and make creation to flourish. It is a love born of concern for the other. This love actualizes our God-given power to bring about good. This power is found in serving the well-being of all. Jesus invites us on a journey and models for us the way: Let go! Don't cling! Don't hoard! Don't assert your importance! Don't worry! *"...it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!"*

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr wrote, *"If we want to turn a new leaf and really set a new humanity afoot, we must begin to turn humanity away from the long desolate night of violence [born of domination]. May it not be that the new humanity the world needs is the nonviolent human? ...This will not only make us new people, but will give us a new kind of power...It will be a power infused with love and justice, that will change dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows, and lift us from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope."*

Peace,

Fr Ron