

The scripture readings of today's liturgy highlight the path to greatness through suffering. There is an old legend about a pig and a chicken who were walking through a poverty-stricken area. Full of compassion the chicken said, "These people need a good breakfast. Let's give them some ham and eggs." The pig replied, "Wait a minute. For you to provide eggs would require only compassion. For me to supply ham would require total sacrifice."

Both compassion and total commitment are essential to the Christian lifestyle. Jesus said, "*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*" In today's Gospel James and John want to be great, and Our Lord wants to show them the path they did not expect would achieve it: sacrificing oneself for the sake of others. Our true greatness comes from the degree to which we give ourselves to others, just like Our Lord.

First Reading speaks of the Suffering Servant and the fruits of his suffering for himself and others. The Suffering Servant is a prophecy over 600 years before the birth of Christ, and the "cup" to which he refers in today's Gospel is the suffering he knows he must endure for us. Suffering has a purpose: through Christ's suffering, we are justified and receive eternal life. No one likes needless suffering. We seek to alleviate it, but it is not needless if it has a purpose.

In today's Second Reading we see the **glory** that Our Lord received for drinking the cup of suffering: he became our High Priest by sacrificing himself. A priest mediates between God and others and offers sacrifice to God on their behalf. In imitation of Christ, a priest also offer sacrifices for others, the greatest sacrifice. Suffering and trials are the path to glory for a disciple of Christ, but not senselessly: through suffering and trials we too serve others and give our lives for them to be "ransomed" from sin.

In today's Gospel James and John are seeking glory, but they don't entirely understand the path to it or the kind of glory to be won. Our Lord works with them; he speaks of a cup to drink and a baptism to receive: both refer to his Passion. we have seen the path to glory that Our Lord has traced out for us. Let's seek the glory that not only benefits us, but others as well: a glory only won through suffering and trials for the sake of others in imitation of Christ. '*Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on Earth*' (Muhammad Ali)

When Mother Teresa visited Los Angeles a few years ago, a physician named Gerald Jampolski heard her speak. Attracted by the spiritual power that emanated from her, he asked her, "Would it be alright if I accompanied you on your coming tour to Mexico? Whenever I am around you, I feel the presence of God."

She replied, "Dr. Jampolski, I do not object to your joining me, but you said you wanted to experience inner peace. Find out how much it costs to fly to Mexico and back. Give that money to feed and clothe someone in need, and you will find the inner peace you seek." Dr. Jampolski followed her advice and discovered she was right.

Jesus understood how to be great, though. He told James and John, and He tells us, that greatness comes through service. Think about people you know that you can say with confidence that he or she is a great person. My guess is that person is someone who continually reaches out to other people. Someone is sick, he or she is there. Someone is having a bad day, he or she is there. Someone needs help with a difficult job, he or she doesn't even need to be asked. You see, truly great people have learned how to be great from He who is the One True Master, Jesus Christ, the Greatest of All Time.

All of us have different gifts. We have a responsibility to develop our gifts in service to the Lord. What can I do best? What do you do best? Some people are capable of caring for the confined with mercy, compassion and justice. Others have a great deal of empathy for the sick. Still others have a heart for the poor. Some are capable of teaching. Others are great parents not just to their own children but to those orphaned by the circumstances of their lives. We all have many talents. Our talents are given to us to serve others. We are called to develop these talents. We are called to greatness. Rabindranath Tagore, a great poet said: *'I slept and dreamt that life was nothing but joy. I woke up and realized that life was only service. I served and I understood that service was joy'*.

Perhaps you have heard the beautiful children's story about the three trees? The trees were talking in the forest one day about their dreams for the future. The first tree said it would like to be made into a cradle, so that it might go on living as a support for the fragile life of a tiny new baby. The second tree wanted to be made into a big ship, so that it might go on living, carrying important cargo and influential people to exotic new lands. The third tree longed to stay right where it was, existing only as a tree, but growing ever taller, and pointing ever higher, to remind everyone that there is a God in heaven who loves them. Those were their dreams: One wanted to be a cradle, one wanted to be a mighty ship, and one wanted to be a tall tree, pointing people toward God.

But then one day the woodcutters came and chopped down the three trees...and destroyed their dreams. The first tree was not made into a cradle, but into a simple feeding-box, a manger for animals. But the manger was sold to a family in Bethlehem, and on the night, Jesus was born, that simple feed box became the cradle for the Christ Child. The second tree was built into a boat, but not the kind it had dreamed of--not a mighty ocean-going vessel--but a tiny inexpensive fishing boat. A man named Simon Peter bought the boat, and on one warm afternoon when the crowds pressed in, Jesus himself climbed aboard that small fishing boat that he might preach good news to the multitudes. The third tree also was deprived of its dream. It wanted to remain standing tall and pointing toward God. Instead, it was cut down and shaped into a horrible instrument of torture, a cross. But it was on that very cross that Jesus was crucified, transforming a symbol of cruelty into a powerful reminder of God's eternal love for all the people. The three trees were humbled, but in the plan of God, they were exalted. That's the way it works: When we, in humility, give ourselves to God, our Lord can do great things through us and for us--greater than we can ever imagine. Amen.