

## HOMILY

### *The Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time* *October 18, 2009*

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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 commitment."

Both compassion and commitment are essential to the Christian lifestyle. Didn't Jesus say, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Try to visualize this scene: Jesus and his disciples are striding down the road to Jerusalem. That's the last place the disciples want to go. It's a snake pit full of enemies. The disciples hang back while Jesus strides out ahead. Then James and John, after some private conferring, march up beside Jesus and in a muffled tone that the other disciples cannot hear ask him a question: "When you are elected president of the Kingdom of God, will you allow us to be your secretary of state and secretary of defense?"

Jesus hid his disappointment over such a question and asked, "Are you willing to pay the price of being my disciples?"

"Oh, yes," they said glibly. "We're with you all the way. You can count on us."

Jesus was so kind. He did not say, "Are you kidding me? You'll run away the minute things get tough." Instead he said, "It's not up to me to give places of honor in the Kingdom of God; that is the task for my Father."

Then he said, "Stop thinking about what's in it for you. We don't operate like other organizations in the world where rank has its privileges. In our operation the greatest people are the ones who serve the most. Remember, I didn't come to this earth to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many. If you want to follow me, you must learn to serve."

We're no different than James and John. We want a share in the glory. Most of us prefer what Bishop Marshall has called "decaffeinated Christianity," the kind of Christianity that doesn't keep you awake at night. This kind of religion costs little, won't require you to get involved in controversy or other peoples' troubles or needs, and will surround you with comfort. Some people want a church that is sort of a Sunday civic club, one that requires no dues but looks good on your resume.

Jesus was trying to get his disciples to forget their petty power games for a moment and join with him in redeeming the world. He was getting ready to lay down his life. He needed them to lay down their lives, their hopes, their dreams, their aspirations. He needed them to forget about being masters but become servants. He wasn't distressed with them because they were ambitious. He was distressed with them because they were ambitious for the wrong thing.

Jesus has no problem with people who are ambitious. God created us to dream, to aspire, to strive for the best. That is how the world advances, through ambitious people. Jesus has no problem with the desire to be the CEO, the desire to be recognized among your peers, even the desire to have nice things. But the question Jesus would ask is, **"Is that it? Is that the extent of your dreams?"** After all, these things are fleeting. Who will be living in your nice home 100 years from now? Who will be leading your company? Many of our dreams are too small. They are for this world only, and they provide limited satisfaction at best.

Don't you want something more? Do you want to be part of something that is eternal? Don't you want to be part of saving this lost and lonely world? Wouldn't it be marvelous to know that, because of you, hungry people are being fed. Because of you, little children have a chance at a better life. Because of you, people are affirmed for who they are not just what they do. Because of you, people are finding meaning and purpose for their lives. Isn't that what life is about? Making a difference, saving a life, redeeming a world.

Would you like to experience God's blessings firsthand? Maybe the problem is that your dream is too small. Maybe that's why you feel unfulfilled. James and John wanted to sit at Jesus' right and left hand when he came into his glory. Jesus wasn't upset with their dreams. He just wanted them to know their dreams were too small. He wanted them to join him in the biggest purpose of all—to join him in bringing salvation to the world by being a servant to others.

Jesus asked James and John, “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” They didn’t know what that meant at the time, but they soon learned. One tradition maintains that when James was executed, one of the Roman guards who led him to his death was so moved by James’ gentleness that he confessed to being a follower of Christ. Legend has it that James turned to him and said, “Peace be to you, brother,” and kissed him. And the two of them were beheaded together.

Not exactly what James and John had in mind when they came to Jesus that day. They had their dream then they caught Jesus’ dream—the dream of bringing a lost world to God. They saw Jesus lay down his life to make this dream a reality. If they were going to drink of this cup, they knew they must be willing to make such a sacrifice themselves. Never in their wildest dreams could they have imagined that today over one billion people walk under the banner of Christ.

Friend, what is your dream? Is it a little puny dream? Or is it God’s dream?

