

HOMILY
October 22, 2006

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

A very short boy wanted desperately to play basketball. He even told his dad that he wanted to become a pro when he was older. Knowing that his son would never be able to play the game, the dad asked the local coach if there was anything that he could recommend to make the boy taller. “You might take him down to the museum and put him on that old torture stretch rack,” the coach said. Several weeks later, the coach asked the father if putting the boy on the stretch rack had helped. “Well, it didn’t make him any taller,” said the dad, “but he confessed to several things that I never knew he did.”

We all have our dreams, don’t we? To play starting guard on the basketball team. To be top sales person in our company. To have the nicest home in the community. To have the perfect family. To retire when we’re young enough to live out some of our dreams. Nothing is more natural than to dream. But to achieve that dream, what is the cost that we are willing to pay? How much are we willing to invest of ourselves so that dream might come true?

That was the issue with James and John. They come to Jesus with a request—they have a dream. “Let one of us sit at your right hand and the other at your left when you come into your glory.” They wanted to sit at the head table. They wanted the offices with the window on the top floor overlooking the city. They wanted power, influence. They wanted to be somebody special.

How did Jesus respond? Do you know what you are asking? “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” James and John were asking for donated dignity. They were asking to move ahead to the head of the line, not on the basis of merit, but on their personal relationship with the boss. They didn’t want to earn their way. They wanted a shortcut, an unfair advantage.

At a tee-ball game, a little boy came up to bat. He swatted the ball off the tee and ran as fast as he could to third base. Not first base, as you expect, but third. The coach went over to the boy and said, “Boy, you sure hit that ball a long way.” The

little fellow beamed, “I sure did!” “Yeah,” said the coach, “and you ran really fast to third base and surprised everybody!” “I sure did!” the little guy said. “I just have one question to ask you,” the coach continued. “Why did you run to third base instead of to first?” “Well, cause that’s where I want to go and I could get there a lot faster that way.” Well, it does make sense to run to third first, if you don’t want to conform to the silly rules of baseball.

Maybe you have heard “no cross, no crown.” Or you have heard the saying the Sisters use to say in grade school—“no guts, no glory.” There are no short cuts to getting into God’s kingdom. There’s no running directly to third base by skipping first base. Jesus says, “Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you must be the slave of all.”

One of the most brilliant persons who ever lived in the 20th Century was Dr. Albert Schweitzer. He left his very prosperous medical practice to serve the poorest of the poor in the most undeveloped parts of the world. In his journal he writes, “I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know, the only ones among you who will really be happy are those who have sought and found a way to serve.” Have you sought and have you found a way to serve?

In a similar vein, John F. Kennedy, in the 60’s, spoke to our nation: “...ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” A country’s greatness only comes from the rank and file of those people who are willing to roll up their sleeves and not just talk about freedom but to want freedom.

So James and John needed their concept of power put into perspective. They thought they understood power, but Jesus shows them that real power resides in humble acts of service. Jesus calls the disciples around him: “Whoever wants to become great among you” he said, “must be your servant, and whoever want to be first must be slave of all.” And so it is anew idea. Greatness comes by giving of our self. Greatness comes by taking the lowest job. Greatness comes by saying here I am. How can I help you?

Why are we like this? Why do we pursue positions of power when there is so much more reward in reaching out to others? 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 trough, a manger for animals. But the manger was sold to a family in Bethlehem, and on the night Jesus was born, the 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 of all the people.

Yes, friends, the three trees were humbled, but in the plan of God, they were exalted. The three trees' dreams did not come true in their way but in God's way. In God's dreams they became even greater. And that's the way it works for you and me. 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, more than we could ever, ever dream..