

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Arrogance Has No Place in the Life of a Christian

Queen Victoria, the great queen of England who ruled from 1838 to 1901 had nine children. She never nursed any of them. She said she was a queen. Nursing a child, she said, would be beneath her dignity. When they were little, the children would be cared for by various nannies. Once a day, they would be presented to the Queen and their father, Prince Albert. They would be dressed properly and recite their lessons or, perhaps, even play games with their parents for about an hour. They would not eat with their parents until they were teenagers. Their parents did not tuck them in at night. That was beneath their parents' dignity.

There was nothing extraordinary about Victoria and Albert's parenting. Care for a child was something that many people of Victoria's time relegated to the poor. The poor cared for their own children, and they cared for the children of the rich.

At the same time as the reign of Queen Victoria, the well off in America often had their slaves or a freed African lady care for their children. These parents also thought that they were too important to lower themselves to child care.

Even in modern America, which is very much child-centric, there are still people who question the work of child care. They ask, "Is this something that someone with a college degree should do?" Many stay-at-home-moms, and stay-at-home-dads who say that their job is bringing up their children are often looked at with a bit of condescension, as though they are not really contributing to society. Some would presume that the stay at home parents are obviously rich and can afford not to have both parents earning paychecks.

This is not true. There are many families who would be much better off financially if both parents had jobs that paid money, but they would much rather have a job that pays in healthy and happy children.

No one is too good to care for a child. No one's position in life is too high for that person to stoop down and pick up a crying toddler.

In today's Gospel, Jesus hears the disciples arguing about which of them was the greatest. Jesus used a child to convey what the true work of a Christian is. What he was saying is that there is no room for arrogance in the Kingdom of God.

The wicked in the first reading, from the *Book of Wisdom*, were arrogant. They hated the Just One because he was not concerned with what they perceived as their exalted position. He reproached them for transgressing the Law of God and violating their training as ministers of God. They were upset that they were not getting the respect they felt others owed them. The argument against the Just One that they voice with such intense hatred is the same argument that later leaders would hurl against

Jesus. They were so concerned about themselves and so vehement in their hatred of Jesus that they demanded that Jesus be put to death. All Jesus was doing was challenging them to return to a pure worship of God. But instead of listening to Him, they plotted to have him killed as quickly and as painfully as possible.

This was not shocking to Jesus. In the first part of today's gospel he told his disciples that this would happen. But the disciples were not concerned with hearing him. They were too busy considering who was the greatest among them. Each was looking for respect from the others. Each was demanding a position of greater respect than the other disciples. Finally, Jesus had enough of this talk. He turned the tables on them. He called over a child, and he said, "You want to be great? Well, take care of a child." Now, changing diapers and wiping running noses did not seem to them to be the work of a great person. But this is the work of the great in the Kingdom of God. For in the Kingdom of God anyone who wishes to be first, had to be last of all and a servant to all.

"Where jealousy and self ambition exist there is disorder and every foul practice," *James* warns in the second reading. He goes on to say that wars, conflicts, and every sort of evil flow from an attitude that makes continual demands on others. The apostle James had learned the lesson that he was taught in today's Gospel when he was just a follower of the Lord. True wisdom is pure, peaceful, compliant, full of mercy and good fruit, and without inconsistency or insincerity. The fruit of this type of selfless wisdom is peace.

Perhaps there are times that we all are too concerned with getting the respect we think we are due in society, be that society in general, or the society of our home, workplace or school. Perhaps, there are times that we all are more concerned with what others are saying or even thinking about us then we are concerned with who we are. We are followers of Jesus Christ. His way is the way of service.

Who are the best people at work? Who are the best students in a school? Who are the best people in our families? Who are the best people in our society? The best people are those who are kind, compassionate, just, full of mercy and all those good things that James wrote about in today's second reading.

Maybe we need to think about some of those grudges we still hold on to so tightly. So many of our grudges come from our conviction that we were not treated with the respect we felt we had a right to, be that from a boss, a neighbor, a distant relative or even a member of our immediate family.

This is wrong, very wrong. The way of the Christian is not the way of being concerned with what others think. We are Christians. The basic attitude of our relationship with others must be that of Jesus Christ. His way was the way of service. Christianity is not a popularity contest. It is a contest of service. The Christian is not concerned with getting respect. He is concerned with giving respect.

At the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer the priest and deacon hold up the Blessed Sacrament and proclaim: "Through Him and with Him and in Him, O God Almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, forever and ever." All answer, "Amen." That is both an affirmation of the miracle of the Eucharist and a proclamation that the only glory and honor we need to be concerned with is that which we give to God. That is the way of Jesus Christ. That is the way of the Christian.

St. Teresa of Calcutta addressed this problem head on. She wrote or at least edited a prayer for her sisters, and really for us, to help us understand what really we need to be concerned with in life:

*People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered.
Forgive them anyway.*

*If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives.
Be kind anyway.*

*If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies.
Succeed anyway.*

*If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you.
Be honest and sincere anyway.*

*What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight.
Create anyway.*

*If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous.
Be happy anyway.*

*The good you do today, will often be forgotten.
Do good anyway.*

*Give the best you have, and it will never be enough.
Give your best anyway.*

*In the final analysis, it is between you and God.
It was never between you and them anyway.*

This is the way of wisdom.

This is the way of the Christian