

- Today's Gospel reading poses two questions for us to consider: What should we ask of God? and What does God ask of us?
- Let's consider the first question. What should we ask of God? In our reading we see two of Jesus' Apostles, James and John, say to Jesus: "We want you to do whatever we ask of you".
- We know that we can pray to God and ask for things but these two disciples are really pushing it too far. They leave no room for God's will, for trusting in God's plan. And look at what they ask for: fame, glory, positions of honor and power – let us be closest to you.
- Most parents that have more than one child can relate to Jesus when James and John ask this question of Him. Many of us had the experience of one of our children asking us (usually when the others are not around): "Am I your favorite child?". It happens usually when they are younger – and we know it is not a mature question. The child cannot yet grasp the depth of love a parent can have for each of their children.
- James and John were at that same immature stage. They did not yet understand the depth of love Jesus has for all of His followers.
- In next weeks Gospel reading we will read about a blind man named Bartemeus. And it is worth just a peak ahead because there is a really great comparison here.
- We will hear Bartemeus cry out: "Jesus have pity on me", NOT "I want you to do whatever I ask". Bartemeus humbly asks: "Master, I want to see." A request made out of necessity not vanity and hunger for power and prestige.
- And it is interesting to compare Jesus' response in both of these situations. To James and John, Jesus says: No, you have it all wrong. Then He patiently explains the definition of greatness to them – it is loving and serving others.
- To Bartemeus Jesus says: "Go, your faith has saved you." Bartemeus receives his sight and becomes a follower of Jesus.
- Notice the important difference here. Notice *how* each approached Jesus. Bartemeus humbly. James and John as if

Jesus owed them something. Notice *what* they ask for. At that point, James and John were following Jesus to be rewarded. Bartemeus asked for healing and then followed Jesus out of faith and love and gratitude.

- This comparison reminds us to think carefully about how *we* approach God and what *we* ask for. Do we see God as a dispenser of divine favors who owes us something? We fall into that trap sometimes, don't we? How many times have we said to God: "Give me this God, because I did that". "If you do this, I'll never do that again."
- Or do we see God as a loving Father, whom we trust, who loves us and has wonderful plans for our lives? Do we ask with these things in mind? Do we ask God for the right things? Like the grace to view something differently.
- In order to ask for the right things, the things mature disciples ask for – we need to consider the second question today's gospel poses: What does God ask of us?
- Simply put, god asks us to be His love, His presence in this world. In our business place, our schools, among friends – everywhere! God asks us to live our lives in such a way that others can't help but recognize Him.
- In today's gospel reading, Jesus deepens our understanding of how to do this. When He says to His disciples: "Can you drink the cup that I drink?" Jesus is telling them He is going to live life a certain way. He is going to have a certain attitude and way of looking at things, embrace particular values. Jesus invites them and each of us to do the same. He tells us greatness is not about power and prestige, greatness is about love and service to others – especially the poor and needy.
- Jesus sums up the answer to the question: "What does God ask of us?" in one word – Service. In order to bring gods love into the world, in order to be His presence we must serve each other.
- Jesus reminds James and John and each of us to treat each person as a gift from God. He tells us to take joy in serving and not to see it as something burdensome. Not to see serving as something we are required to do but rather something we

want to do. Serving is what Jesus' followers are called be – at our very core.

- So how do we do it? How do we take these teachings and make them real in our lives? Now that we know what God asks of us, how can we best respond?
- Maybe the first step is to realize it is easy for us to fall into the trap James and John did. Get a little too caught up in looking for rewards and ways to gain things for ourselves. Sometimes viewing others as obstacles or competition.
- James and John eventually changed their outlook. Changed by focusing outward on God and others rather than inward on themselves. How? They looked closely at Jesus and imitated Him. We too can look at Jesus' life for specific examples on how to serve others.
- Jesus was a healer. We too can serve as healers. Maybe choosing a career in medicine or counseling. We can visit the sick and lonely, donate blood, and donate food to the hungry. We can heal those emotional wounds that can exist in our families, at work and among friends. It is in our power to heal. We can make the first move: extend our hand, say I'm sorry, and bring others back together.
- Jesus gave life to the dead. We too can bring life to others – it is not as impossible as it sounds. People can be physically alive but dead in other aspects of their life. There are those whose faith is dead – they don't believe in god or that God loves them. There are people with no hopes or dreams. People battling depression and anxiety. We can talk and listen and encourage and bring them the life giving love of God.
- Jesus was a teacher. He knew the truth and wasn't afraid to speak it. We can serve as teachers in our world, promoting basic truths like the sacredness of life and the dignity of every human person. We can teach the faith to our children, teach the importance of honesty and the beauty of family life.
- Jesus was a prayer. He prayed for others, prayed over others. One of the most powerful ways we have to serve others is to pray for them.

- The particular type of service we are called to can take on different forms. Most times we serve in little ways that are not so little. My patron saint, Saint Therese of Liseux, called these “simple acts of love “ and “ growing where God plants you”.
- Whatever the type of service we are each called to, there is one thing we all share in common: We are bringing God’s love and God’s presence into a world that desperately needs that love, that presence.
- One closing thought. Our church sets aside this Sunday as World Mission Sunday. Today we pray for all missionaries. Those people called to leave the comfort of their homes, families and friends to live in far-off, often dangerous parts of the world in areas with little food or clean water. They hug and comfort and care for the sickest of the sick and the poorest of the poor. They often work amidst contagious disease without fear for their personal well-being. They open schools where none exist and teach the love of God by their words and actions. They are able to do this difficult work because they put their faith and trust in God. Let’s remember to say a prayer for these individuals who model what service is all about.