

- There is one sentence in today's Gospel reading that struck me as odd.
- Jesus was speaking to his Apostles, His closest friends and followers. He had just predicted his death and resurrection. Then we read the sentence: "They did not understand the saying and they were afraid to question Him."
- I kept wondering why they were afraid to question Him. They were Jesus' closest followers, His "inner circle". Why would they be afraid to just say: "We don't understand. Can you explain why?"
- As I puzzled on this and thought about times in my life when I was afraid to ask a question it occurred to me that there are usually only three reasons you would be afraid to ask a question.
- We could be afraid of getting yelled at by the person you are questioning. This happens to me (and probably other husbands) many times. My wife will be telling me something while I am watching a football game on TV and I will just "yes" her without really listening. Soon after that, I will ask a question about the thing she just gave the answer to – into the "dog house" I go.
- Is it likely the disciples were afraid of getting yelled at or reprimanded by Jesus? Maybe, but we don't see Jesus yelling much in scripture, especially not at His followers. We usually see a loving, patient Jesus. His disciples know Him as a teacher, a healer, and a loving kind person. So they probably weren't afraid of being yelled at.
- Sometimes we are afraid to ask a question because we don't want to look "dumb". We men are famous for this. We hate to stop and ask for directions when we are lost. It pains us to admit to ourselves and to someone else that we don't know where we are. There has probably been a time in all of our lives when we thought everyone around us understood a particular subject except us. But we won't ask a question for fear of looking "dumb".

- Were the disciples afraid of looking “dumb”? Possibly. We know they were arguing among themselves as to who was the greatest. Certainly if one of them admitted they didn’t understand what Jesus just told them, they might appear dumb or it might appear that another of them was greater.
- But there is a third reason we are sometimes afraid to ask a question.
- We could be afraid of the answer!
- Afraid of what that answer might require us to do. So we just don’t ask.
- We know the disciples had their own idea of what the Kingdom of God would be like. This idea was part of their upbringing as Jewish men of that time period. They thought the messiah would overthrow the Roman rulers and return the Kingdom to the Jewish people. They were thinking human thoughts of power and control and their part in all of it. When Jesus spoke of His suffering and death it probably frightened them. It was not what they expected to hear nor wanted to hear.
- But Jesus was thinking divine thoughts. He was describing His cross and the way He would save humanity. Jesus came to deliver the message that would save us all: “Love God and love each other”. And Jesus lived out that message by setting examples for us to follow.
- Jesus served us all by His words and examples, even to the point of dying on the cross at the hands of those who wanted to silence His message. But the cross only made Jesus’ message louder and let it echo throughout all time.
- Jesus knew His disciples still didn’t understand about the Kingdom of God. But it was critical that they come to understand because Jesus was depending on them to build up that Kingdom when He was no longer physically present in the world. So we see Jesus patiently sit them down and go through it again. Jesus meets them where their thoughts are at - to effectively make His point. So He tells them: You want to be the greatest? The First? – Here is how you do it.

- Jesus tells them God's Kingdom is about love and service to others. It is not a power trip. He uses a child to symbolize all the small things: all the poor, all those on the fringe of society. And He tells His followers – you must love and serve them.
- In today's Gospel reading our God sums up in two words our role as a church in the world and our role as individuals in this world. Humility and Service.
- As a church, a believing community, we are called to serve. And we do! Catholic Charities is one of the largest social services entities in NY State. We collect funds for the poor; we provide food pantries, clothing drives, education and health services. Our church is currently assisting refugees from Afghanistan to escape persecution by finding homes for them in other countries worldwide. All these things spring from the Jesus' words in today's Gospel. As a church we are called to keep this good work ongoing and to be open to new possibilities and opportunities to serve. Even when we are criticized. Even when those who would again like to silence Jesus message threaten us. As a church we must stay the course.
- And as individuals living in this world, we are called to serve. We are called in little ways that are really not so little. A friendly smile, a helping hand, taking the time to listen, praying for those in need –it is all service!
- Sometimes service can be difficult, as when we are called to care for a sick or needy family member or friend. At those times it is especially important to remember why we are serving. Jesus told us if you receive them in my name, you receive Me and the Father who sent Me.
- Serving as a church and as individuals will not always be easy. We may have questions like: Why is this happening? What is my role in this situation? What can I do?
- It comes back to not being afraid to ask Jesus these questions.
- We won't get yelled at.
- He won't think we are dumb.
- He will answer and guide us

- And it comes down to us not being afraid of the answer. Like those disciples we have our own ideas about what our lives should be like. Sometimes we don't question Jesus because we are afraid He might just answer us. And that answer might challenge us, change us.
- But we are called to overcome that fear, to ask, to listen to the answer and to trust.
- There is a beautiful little saying to remember: "God will never lead you where His grace will not sustain you."
- So why not just ask.