

Reflection on Mark 10:35-45

This Gospel reading opens as James and John come to Jesus and say: “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” What bold words! Did James and John actually believe that Jesus would simply obey their command? However, Jesus does not seem to be ruffled or upset. Rather he simply asks them: “What do you want me to do for you?” They responded: “Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left.” Jesus warns them: “You do not know what you are asking!”

Jesus then asks them: “Can you truly drink the cup that I drink? Are you willing to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” James and John blithely respond with the words: “We can!” Jesus then says to them: “The cup that I drink, you will drink, and the baptism with which I was baptized, you also will be baptized. However, your request to sit at my right and left hand is not mine to give. Rather it will be given to those for whom it has been prepared.”

Remember: this conversation takes place in the presence of the other disciples. Now put yourself in the place of the other 10 disciples. What are the emotions you think they may have experienced as these two men boldly make their request to Jesus? After all, each one of the disciples had left their families, homes and work to follow Jesus. Did James and John truly think they were better than the other disciples? Or were they simply trying to gain a higher position and also have more influence with Jesus?

The desire for power and status is an inherent longing in most human beings. Each one of us needs to know that we do have a certain amount of power and status. Power gives us some control in our lives. We also have a natural desire for the people in our lives to love us, care for us and admire us. However, we get in trouble when our desire for power, love or status begins to control us. This is why Jesus sternly warns his disciples. Jesus desires that we serve others rather than to be served. He wants us to use our energy to serve those in need, rather than striving for first place, for acclaim or for power.

Every day in our world numerous people jockey for power, esteem and position. This need is so inherent in us human beings that often we do not recognize the subtle ways we strive for power, esteem or position. I wonder if our need to serve others is as natural to us as our need and desire for recognition and power. Today take a few moments and ask yourself: How strong is my need for power and acclaim? How deep is my need to serve others? Which need comes first in my life?

Jesus’ primary desire is that we quietly and simply love and serve the individuals in our lives as he did. If we do this well, we will receive the acclaim we desire from Jesus. Can we be satisfied with this? I pray we can!