

29th Sunday, yr. B., Xavier Church, Isa. 53, 10-11; Ps. 33, 4-5. 18-19, 20-22; Heb. 4, 14-16; Mk. 10, 35-45. Ward Biemans SJ

Brothers and sisters, the drive for success in our society is great. Recently, in the world of sports, for example, there were stories of gymnasts who are put under pressure and humiliated in order to perform as well as possible. In music, some artists are so strictly supervised that they develop all kinds of psychological complaints, which they sometimes have difficulty overcoming. In science or in journalism you score points when you write critically about your colleagues: a striking opinion often has more chance of publication than a cautious point of view.

Today's Gospel reading makes it clear that pride of place even existed among Jesus' disciples. James and John want Jesus to give them a place of honour in heaven at his right and left hand. And they express this desire immediately after Jesus had predicted for the third time that He would have to suffer in Jerusalem, be condemned to death and then rise again. Apparently they had understood very little of this message.

Jesus had chosen the same James and John to witness His transfiguration on the mountain, where He briefly shone before their eyes in all His glory. Yet, a short time later, they dream of being allowed to be as close to Him as possible in heaven. Jesus does not reject their request, but He says that they do not know what they are asking. It is not for Him to decide this, but for His Father in heaven. Jesus points out that they, as his followers, and we too, share in the mystery of Jesus' suffering and death, by sharing in his baptism and by drinking the cup He gives us. And Jesus reminds us that often, earthly power leads to abuse of power and that this should not be the case in the Church. I think that the humiliation the Church is currently going through after yet another report of abuse, this time in France, makes us aware of the truth of this warning once again. It is therefore right that the truth is brought out and that justice is done for victims of abuse. Followers of Jesus must train themselves in service, for therein lies their greatness.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of a decision by the Lord Himself to humble His servant and make him suffer. It is through these efforts that the Lord's servant will justify many others. At first glance, this may sound harsh, but when we take a closer look, I think we can imagine it. Think of the work of nurses, of teachers or of missionaries. Often, they are people who give themselves completely for the benefit of the sick, of children or of people who do not yet know Christ.

Sometimes, their work may be very hard, but when many others can benefit from it, it is also very rewarding. Or think of the work of the many volunteers who serve in the Church, or of grandparents who care for their grandchildren, or of young people who are carers for their family.

Thanks to their efforts and sometimes their struggles, others come to believe in the goodness of their fellow men and thus, with the help of his grace, in the love of God. And they themselves, after their suffering, will see the light and be satiated.

Brothers and sisters, the mystery of suffering is further explained by the letter to the Hebrews, from which we heard in the second reading. We have a High Priest who is able to sympathise with our weaknesses, says the author. That High Priest is Jesus, the Son of God. He who has passed through the heavens, who has ascended into heaven. One could imagine that Christ had broken off his relationship with us after his ascension. Precisely because He knows that we all have our weaknesses. But thank God He did not break off His relationship with us. He is still with us and comes to us in the celebration of the sacraments and his Spirit dwells in us. Because Jesus has stood the test of suffering, He can help all who are being tested. That is why the Church asks us to hold fast to our confession in Him. Faith can not only give us strength to endure in difficulties, but it also supports us in helping others. And finally, faith in Jesus brings us to eternal bliss. Amen.