

In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio comments: "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." There is a large measure of truth in this observation, but it falls short in any discussion of greatness from the Christian point of view. True greatness is neither born in you, nor achieved by you, nor imposed upon you. It is, rather, the byproduct of the deeper qualities of our human nature. Three qualities mankind hunger after and risk everything to achieve it, are wealth, influence, and power. We believe we can be great by acquiring one of these gifts. But God has other standards for measuring true greatness.

In today's Gospel passage, for example, the Twelve Apostles, Christ's closest companions, make this very choice. He has been explaining to them that he will soon be arrested, unjustly condemned, mocked, and crucified. But after the explanation, the apostles start arguing about who's going to get which positions - who will be prime minister, who will be secretary of the treasury, who will be defense minister... Who is the greatest?

Let us pause for a moment and go back in time to the days we were young, and our parents spent their lives for us. Probably they were not rich and famous. Most likely they gave you what you could not give yourself. Probably they taught you important lessons, gave you important ideas and values. Undoubtedly, they unselfishly gave you, their love. They gave you their time, their energy, and their concern; they gave you quality time and attention. They probably sacrificed their own comfort and convenience to give you things they did not have to give you but simply wanted to give you. Most likely they corrected you when you went astray; they gave you moral norms, guidelines to develop a quality character and nobility of soul and challenged you to be a better person.

They taught you how to love God, transmitted their values to you, they mentored you by their example of Christian living, they nurtured you in the life of our Church and her Sacraments. They were, in a word, your servants, placing before you on life's banquet table the necessary food for your soul. The meaning of success, then, truly is service. That's why Jesus places a little child, the most vulnerable and the most dependent of us all before our eyes. The true test of your life and mine is how we deal with those who are weaker than we are, more dependent than we are, more vulnerable than we are. We can ignore them, or we can devote our lives to caring for them. That's the choice Jesus gave to His disciples, and that's the choice Jesus puts in front of you and me here today. Jesus calls us to be his disciples, His true followers. He calls us to set aside our own desires for the sake of others. "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be last of all and the servant of all."

The jealousy and selfish ambition that attacks the just man in the *Book of Wisdom* in our first reading, and that *James* rebukes in the second reading are the sad marks of identification of the godless, people who have rejected God and His Son. The sign of the Christian is seen in setting another's needs over his or her wants.

Greatest in the Kingdom of God

We are all called to do this, continually. Every day, every moment of the day you and I are called to consider others over ourselves. The needs of the children, the sick, the poor and the elderly call us away from ourselves and call us into Jesus. Every day we must resist the temptation to selfishness, the temptation to put ourselves before others. Every day we are called to be the Presence of Jesus for others.

True greatness cannot be bought or sold. We receive true greatness when we serve others. St. Teresa of Calcutta gives an example of this: *“One evening we went out and we picked up four people from the street. And one of them was in a most terrible condition. I told the sisters: “You take care of the other three; I will take care of the one who looks worse.” So, I did for her all that my love can do. I put her in bed, and there was such a beautiful smile on her face. She took hold of my hand, as she said one word only: “Thank you” - and she died. I could not help but examine my conscience before her. And I asked: “What would I say if I were in her place?” And my answer was very simple. I would have tried to draw a little attention to myself. I would have said: “I am hungry, I am dying, I am cold, I am in pain,” or something. But she gave me much more, she gave me her grateful love. And she died with a smile on her face.* (Acceptance Speech for Nobel Peace Prize in 1979) Also given at National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C., Thursday February 3rd, 1994.)

When we serve, we receive something that money can never buy. With the example of Jesus and St. Mother Teresa before us we can ask ourselves, “What is our attitude to others?” What are we hungering after? The prayer of St. Francis is the key to greatness in God’s kingdom:

*Lord, make me a channel of your peace, Where there is hatred, I may bring love,
Where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness,
Where there is discord, I may bring harmony,
Where there is error, I may bring truth,
Where there is doubt, I may bring faith,
Where there is despair, I may bring hope,
Where there are shadows, I may bring light and
Where there is sadness, I may bring joy.*

We are all called to do this, continually. The needs of the children, the sick, the poor and the elderly call us away from ourselves and call us into Jesus. Let us ask the Lord to give the grace to be a servant to be great in his kingdom.

God Bless You.