

Becoming Servants of the Servant

Whenever I am asked, “Who were the people who influenced your call to faith?” I think of my father and father-in-law. Both men lived much of their lives before Vatican II and its recollection that we are a pilgrim people in a missionary church. Both men had copies of the Thomas a’Kempis *The Imitation of Christ*—a popular devotional book for men of their time—next to their reading chairs. My dad prayed his rosary every day and would finish his devotions by reading something from the *Imitation*.

Today we speak less about becoming imitators of Jesus Christ and more about being his disciples and witnesses to his life, death, resurrection, and mission. The lifestyle of the follower—disciple or imitator of Christ—is depicted in today’s Gospel from Mark for the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Mark 1:29-39). It is the tender image of service returned for service rendered. Today’s gospel verses continue last Sunday’s reading. We know that Jesus presents “...a new kind of teaching” (v. 27) with authority and power to heal the sick and subdue unclean spirits. The events of this section of Mark’s Gospel move very quickly. The crowd around Jesus recognizes the newness of his teaching because the people experience the authority of his powerful words and witness how they lead him to action and service.

The model for the follower is very simple: Upon being informed of Simon’s mother-in-law’s fever Jesus went over to her (initiative) took her hand and raised her up (used his healing power to serve her). At that point Simon’s mother-in-law does what Jesus did—she got up and used her return to health and energy to “then take care of their needs,” (v. 31) that of Jesus and his followers. How do we, who wish to imitate Christ or be his disciple, make our desire a reality? We become servants of the Servant.

St. Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians summarizes our call to service beautifully when he states, “...our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.” (1 Thess1:5-7)

This weekend, as we listen to the proclamation of the gospel and welcome its message, let us recognize, that with the power of Holy Spirit, we have whatever it takes to meet human needs wherever we become aware of them.