

In today's Gospel, Jesus begins to share with His apostles what lies ahead. He begins to tell them of the cup He must drink and the path He must take. Jesus is the Lord, the Eternal King of Kings, and yet He puts all his power, wisdom, and energy, all of His talents, at the service of those He rules. He seeks nothing for Himself. Although He could easily avoid the suffering of His Passion, He chooses not to do so. He chooses not to do so, for our sake.

We, on the other hand, tend to do exactly the opposite. Like James and John, the Sons of Thunder, we often put our own wants and desires ahead of others.

It is something of a truism that our culture has become one of entitlement and self-centeredness. We see examples of this nearly everyday. I have seen a couple of stories in recent months of brides making outrageous demands on their guests, from how they are to dress to the amount of money they should spend on a wedding gift. Imagine the sense of entitlement that justifies such actions. Think of our own interactions with people we meet every day. Do we treat every person with dignity and respect, or do we make demands of them because we feel we deserve something?

We tend to use our gifts and talents to indulge in our own desires, even to the point of ignoring others or treating them unjustly. Along with our aversion to any notion of sacrifice, comes a sense that we are entitled to comfort, or attention, or honor; to the point where we demand it whenever we can.

If there were a motto for the current age it might be “My will be done.”

But Jesus reminds us that, not our will, but God's will be done. And because He was faithful to His vocation as God's suffering servant, He put our salvation ahead of His comfort and honor.

As Christ repeatedly predicts His passion, He is showing us the importance of placing ourselves at the service of others.

The Gospel reading echoes the first reading from the prophet Isaiah. Jesus knows that He will be unjustly condemned, tortured, mocked, and crucified. He knows what waits for Him in Jerusalem but he doesn't turn aside. Everything that He is about to suffer, He suffers willingly; not for any benefit that He will gain, but for our sake and our salvation.

God, became man, lived, suffered, and died, for our sake. He had no self-centered agenda, He came to serve and to give His life for others. We sometimes forget that we are subjects of a King. And the Kingdom we live in has laws. The first law is to love God, but the second is to love each other as much as we love ourselves.

It is not always easy to follow these laws but it is always easy to recognize the rightness of them.

Before the Titanic, one of the most famous shipwrecks happened to an early British steamship called the Birkenhead. It was carrying British troops along with their families to South Africa. On the morning of February 26, the ship struck a large rock that was not noted on the charts. The rock sliced the hull of the ship down the middle, drowning the soldiers who were asleep below decks.

The rest of the passengers and crew scrambled to the upper decks. The captain saved the women and children by lowering them into the lifeboats. By the time the lifeboats were clear, the ship had sunk, only 25 minutes after the collision. With the women and children safely aboard the boats, the men were swimming for their lives against the churning seas, the sharp rocks, and the sharks that had begun to gather.

One of the lifeboats was commanded by a young 17 year old Lieutenant named Russell. As he steered the boat away from the sinking ship a drowning sailor reached up and clutched the side of the boat. One of the women in the boat screamed, "that's my husband! please save him!"

But there was literally no room in the boat. It was jam packed and could not fit even one person more. Lieutenant Russell stood up and jumped into the sea, clear of the boat, and the drowning man was pulled up in his place. The women cried out "God bless you sir," to Russell while they could still see him, but in a few moments he sank from view.

The chances are that few of us will ever be put in such a life and death situation. But the chance to put others first in the little things of life, happens every single day.

Many of us are asking today, what can we do? This is one answer.

Christ came to serve, not to be served, and He calls us to do the same. But we cannot follow His example if we do not spend time contemplating his example, not just on Sunday, but every day.

I know it is difficult. We live in a very noisy world that is constantly vying for our attention and calling us to follow other standards of behavior, false, self-centered standards. So how do we keep our attention fixed on Christ?

The Church gives us many ways but one of the most powerful, one of the most ancient, and one of the simplest, is the Rosary. During the month of October we pay special attention to the Rosary.

Why October?

Because about 500 years ago, Christianity, along with all of Europe, was threatened with being overrun by the Ottoman Empire. Pope Saint Pius VI called on all the Catholics of Europe to unite in prayer through the Rosary as a way to support the Christian soldiers and sailors who had put to sea to meet an enemy invasion in what has come to be known as the battle of Lepanto.

The Christians were vastly outnumbered and outgunned. But the commander of the European fleet, Don John of Austria, went from ship to ship before the battle and led the soldiers and sailors in praying the Rosary. Miraculously, on October 7, 1571, the Christian forces won a victory over nearly impossible odds.

As individuals, each one of us has a battle to fight against every day. The enemy knows our weaknesses and uses the weapons of self-centeredness, self-absorption, and self-righteousness against us. We too can combat these vices and find strength, encouragement, and victory through the ancient prayer of the Rosary.

The Rosary, when prayed properly, is more than just vain repetition of Our Fathers and Hail Marys. Through the Rosary we contemplate the most poignant moments in the life of Our Lord. In the company of Mary, His mother, we turn our hearts and minds to Him through this prayer. And His grace has the chance to touch our souls, making us more like Him, better citizens of His kingdom, and better soldiers in his service.

Praying the Rosary is not a burden, it is a joy. It is a moment of serenity in a world of chaos. We can pray in the chapel, we can pray while we take a walk, or while we drive to work. We can pray all fifteen decades, we can pray five, or we can pray one. We can even find rosaries that will help us keep track of the prayers if all we have time for is one decade.

So let us pray. Let us pray for the strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray for the grace to follow the example of Our Lord and put all of our gifts and talents at the service of others. That is why we are given them in the first place.

And let us pray that we are not just good subjects of the King, let us pray that we are the best.