

A priest once asked a parishioner why the parishioner hadn't been to Mass lately. The parishioner answered, "I don't really get anything out of Mass." The priest was silent for a moment and then responded, "well, it really isn't about you."

We live in a world that constantly reinforces the idea that it really is all about you. For many years now there has been an increasing marketing trend towards "mass customization." It seems like everything is customized to the individual. You can get your coffee exactly how you want it, technology will send you a constant feed of entertainment based on your viewing history, and advertising is continually adjusted to be precisely relevant to you, personally.

The Catholic Church stands in stark contrast to this trend. We place a great deal of emphasis on serving others rather than ourselves. This is how we model Christ.

One of the most important things that Jesus did, by insisting on being baptized by John, was to accept His role as God's suffering servant. With His baptism Jesus enters the public arena and begins His earthly ministry. He leaves behind the carpenter's shop in Nazareth and takes up the mission God has sent Him here to accomplish.

The prophet Isaiah summarizes this mission by using the word servant. Isaiah writes that God says to the Messiah, "you are my servant, Israel, through whom I show my glory." The Hebrew word that is translated for servant is ebed, which more literally means slave. In

the Old Testament it was often used in the context of “slave of a king.” This is not a demeaning term, it is a title of honor.

Moses expresses humility in the presence of God by referring to himself as “your slave.” The Psalms use the term “slave” to describe King David. God calls David, “my slave whom I have chosen.”

The prophets were also spoken of as God's special, honored “servants.” We see this even today when the pope and the bishops refer to themselves as servants of the servants of God.

But Isaiah is not referring to just another prophet or king. Isaiah refers to the Messiah, the one anointed with the Holy Spirit, the unique servant who will restore Israel to the grace it once enjoyed. The Messiah will make Israel a light to the nations and bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth.

The term servant tells us much about Christ, but as His followers, it should also tell us much about ourselves.

The word slave, or even servant, has a very distinct meaning here in America. We tend to associate slavery with southern plantations, using slaves as labor in the field. But in the ancient world slavery was very different. The slave of the master of a house was often highly educated and held a place of honor.

It is true that his life was not his own. “He was his master's purchased property. Bought to serve the master's needs, and to be at his beck and call every moment. The servant's sole business, was to do as he was

told.” *James Packer, Your Father Loves You, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986.*

The servant was very close to his master. The servant of a king even more so. The servant was the one person the king depended on, the one who advised the king, the one in whom the king confided. He was like the prime minister, the viceroy, and the chief of staff all rolled into one. No one else had direct access to the throne. Everyone else had to go through the king's special servant.

Moses, God's slave, went up the mountainside and into the tent of God's presence, but everyone else waited outside.

John Kenneth Galbrath was a chief advisor to president Lyndon Johnson. Galbrath's housekeeper was a woman named Emily Gloria Wilson. After a particularly trying day, Galbrath went in to take a nap and told Emily to hold all his calls. A short while later, the phone rang.

“Get me Ken Galbrath, this is Lyndon Johnson,” said the voice on the phone.

“He is sleeping Mr. President,” answered Emily, “He said not to disturb him.”

“Well wake him up. I want to talk to him.”

“No, Mr. President. I work for him, not you. He will call you back.”

Later when Galbrath returned the president's call, Johnson could hardly control his amusement and told Galbrath, “I want that woman

working for me here in the White House.” *John Kenneth Galbrath, A Life In Our Times*

The relationship of Jesus as a servant to the Father is unique. In Jesus we see God's glory and His humility.

Jesus was not simply a smart, enlightened man who stumbled across some ancient wisdom. He is not another Socrates or Buddha. He is the Eternal Son of God made man, the Savior, the Mediator. Here we see His glory.

But at the same time Jesus is the servant of His Father. He has come to do His Father's will. He has received a mission from His Father and He is responsible for carrying it out. Here we see His humility.

Later in John's Gospel Jesus says that “my food is to do the will of the one who sent me, to accomplish the task he has given me.” So Christ occupies not only a place of supernatural honor, but also a place of complete dependence on His Father.

As Christians, we are called to follow Christ, to imitate Him, to be another Christ to other people. As Christians, our lives do not belong to ourselves, they belong to other people.

When we are baptized we also are anointed by the same Holy Spirit that came upon Jesus at His baptism. As water flows over us, God's grace flows into our souls and we become sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters to Jesus in a very real and true sense. Baptism is not just a symbol, it a sign of a hidden reality.

And so, like Jesus, we occupy a double place in the history of salvation. Each of us is the servant of a king, an intimate companion and collaborator with the Lord. We have direct access to the heavenly throne – access unique to a king's son or daughter. Our true dignity does not depend on ourselves, but on our relationship to God. This is a relationship that allows us to share in the divine nature. We have been adopted by God and brought into God's intimate circle of family, just as Jesus was adopted by Joseph.

But that also means that, like Christ, we have a mission to accomplish here on earth. We are called to do God's will, to fulfill His plan for our lives.

And that plan consists of continuing the work of Christ, restoring this fallen world, and making all things new. We do this one heart at a time, bringing the salvation of God to the ends of the earth.

As Christians we are honored and ennobled far beyond anything we can imagine. But we are also dependent – we are the servants of the King, servants of God.

Like Paul, we can say that we have been called to be apostles of Christ Jesus by the will of God. An apostle is one who is sent. We are sent out into this world of darkness and sin as messengers and ambassadors of Jesus Christ the one true light of the world.

Christian service means, first and foremost, living out a slave relationship to our Savior. The work that Christ sets us, His servants, to do, is to serve Him. We serve Him by becoming the slaves of our

fellow servants, willing to do literally anything, however costly, irksome, or inconvenient, in order to help them. This is what love means, as Jesus Himself showed us at the Last Supper when He played the slave's part and washed the feet of the Apostles.

When the New Testament speaks of ministering to others, it does not primarily mean preaching to them, but devoting time, trouble, and substance to giving them all the practical help possible. The essence of Christian service is loyalty to the King, expressing itself in care for His servants. *James Packer, Your Father Loves You, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986.*

This is who we are. This is who we are called to become more fully.

When we approach and receive His Body and Blood in Holy Communion, we are strengthened to accomplish this mission and then sent out to serve. So let us strive to be worthy brothers and sisters of Our Lord. Let us strive to be worthy servants of Our King.

If we are willing to give up even our very lives in order to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves, then we will be numbered among those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be Holy.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.