

29th Sunday per Annum - B
Isaiah 53:10-11;
Hebrews 4:14-16;
Mark 10:35-45
Little Flower - 10/20/24

My Brothers and Sisters,

When I ask people why Christ died, most people will say that Christ died to save us or that Christ died to save us from our sins. I then ask why the Jews and the Romans of Jesus' time put him to death. People will give various answers. Some will say that the Jews accused Jesus of blasphemy by calling himself the Son of God. Others will say that he challenged their beliefs and/or practices. I would say that Jesus was put to death because he preached and lived love as the only ultimately decisive reality in life.

In today's reading from Hebrews, we are told that Jesus is the great high priest. As we read elsewhere in Hebrews, the role of a high priest is to offer sacrifice for sins. As we heard in Isaiah, "*If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life, and the will of the LORD shall be accomplished through him.*" In other words, Jesus offered his life to God for us.

This statement contains two important truths. If Jesus offered his life, this affirms that all authentic love is sacrificial. All authentic love is self-revealing, self-giving, and self-sacrificing. If he offered his life to God for us, this means that for Christians, love of God and love of neighbor are inseparable. We cannot love God without loving others, and we will not love others authentically without loving God.

The Letter to the Hebrews emphasizes one other important truth. Jesus was only able to save us because he was tested in every way we are but without sin. In other words, it was only because he was both fully human and fully divine that he was able to reconcile us with God, with one another, with ourselves, and with our world.

From the theology of the first two readings, we move to the Gospel story. Once again the apostles simply did not get the meaning and message of Jesus. Along with Peter, James and John were Jesus' closest disciples. Instead of seeking the glory of God and the salvation of others, they sought their own glory, i.e. to sit at his right and his left in his glory. He told them they would suffer, but sitting at his right or left was not his to give. Likewise, the others did not get it either. They became indignant at James and John. At the end of the Gospel, Jesus reminds them and us, "*For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" Like Jesus, we are called to be self-sacrificing servant leaders.

Today we celebrate World Mission Sunday. World Mission Sunday means something very different than it did when I was growing up. When I was growing up, it meant a collection to benefit the Propagation of the Faith which supported both the foreign and home missions. During those years, the United States sent priests, religious sisters, and religious brothers to countries throughout the world to proclaim the Gospel. For example, St. Martine, my first grade teacher, was among the first sisters from Oldenburg to go to Papua, New Guinea. She remained there for 50 years and was the last sister to leave.

The theme of this year's World Mission Day is "Go and invite everyone to the banquet (cf. Mt 22:9)." The truth is we are now a mission country. On Tuesday when I attend the semi-annual Priest/PLC meeting, there will probably be at least as many foreign-born priests as native-born priests. Because of lack of priests and lack of members, parishes are being closed, combined, or asked to share one priest. Therefore, all of us are called to be both evangelizers and re-evangelizers.

My brothers and sisters, in the past the priests and religious who went to the missions found people who were hungry for the Word of God and hungry for the sacraments. The question we must ask ourselves today is whether we and our contemporaries in the United States are hungry for the Word of God and hungry for the sacraments.