

25th Sunday in ordinary Time
22.09.24
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'If anyone wants to be first,' Jesus says quite clearly, 'they must make themselves last of all and servant of all.' As Pope Francis recently paraphrased it: *'Do you want to be first? Serve others. This is the way.'*

Jesus must have surprised the apostles, who were busy arguing about their status. Like children, they were trying to make sense of their social world and relationships. Who was the biggest, the oldest, the first, the best, the favourite?

But, as so often in scripture, Jesus inaugurates a reversal: he overturns the criteria about what truly matters. What we do matters more than what we think we are entitled to. What we do matters more than our ideas of status or superiority. King or cardinal, banker or baggage handler, God looks at whether and how we serve others. Looks at our words and deeds not our supposed status.

Jesus tells his disciples that if anyone wants to be first, they must make themselves last of all and servant of all. It's as challenging to us today as it was to the disciples and early Christians. Our world, just like the world of Jesus and the apostles, seems to revolve around position, status and power – whoever has the most toys wins! But what Jesus advocated was a leadership based on being of service to others. Being powerful simply means you are in a position to help even more people. Putting yourself last, instead of first, gives respect, dignity and power to others rather than to yourself.

Service means to act like Jesus. Service means we should be givers, not getters, servants not masters.

And this reversal, this understanding, changes us: as our care and availability and service toward others grows, we become freer inside, and more like Jesus.

Which is why Jesus draws the apostles' attention to a child. For Jesus, children represented 'littleness,' or dependence. Jesus' followers should focus on serving those who need to receive and cannot give anything in return. In welcoming those on the margins, the neglected, the outcast, the foreigner, the vulnerable, we welcome Jesus because He is there. There in our midst – in the face of neighbour and stranger.