

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

One-Upmanship versus Service Second Week of Lent Wednesday, February 28, 2018
8:15 AM **Jer 18:18-20; Mt 20:17-28** (“Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant.”)

Today’s reading is about **the conflict Jesus had with his own disciples in getting across the very meaning of what he is trying to do.** The Zebedee boys’ mother completely misunderstood everything. She thought the kingdom that he was talking about was an earthly kingdom with a throne and with a court and so on. But even the apostles themselves, although they probably didn’t quite think that, were still **living out of the world of one-upmanship that is part of our human society.**

Now whether they thought it was really the mother of the Zebedee boys that had the idea to ask Jesus for the first and second places or whether they thought that the Zebedees actually put her up to it, that I don’t know, but they were resentful. **They were resentful at the suggestion that anyone of this little group that Jesus had formed would try to get ahead of the others.** So we have to spend some time with this feeling of indignation. It is actually a right feeling; they should be indignant, because **Jesus had already taught them enough that they should know better,** that he had come from the Father in order to serve and help and lift up and bring healing and truth to the bedraggled human race, and that that was their role as well to help. **They were being called into service with him,** and that was already obvious.

What wasn’t obvious, he tells them today, is that he is going to be crucified. That’s why we read from Jeremiah, because **Jeremiah had a similar sort of experience of rejection and persecution and torment.** As far as I know, Jeremiah was not admired by the people of the Old Testament. He was more or less an embarrassment, I think. Well so **Jesus** really is an embarrassment too. He is not succeeding, and at this point he knows it. **He knows that the kingdom he has preached is not going to take root right now,** right here, **not until** something

very dramatic takes place: **his own betrayal, his suffering and death and eventually resurrection.**

Now what did the apostles think about this? Well I doubt they could grasp it, so they were foundering in their mind when the mother of the Zebedees came up here. So it's a little much for them to take in. But **Jesus responds to their indignation with a teaching on what it means to have authority.** And sadly, it's a teaching that Church leaders have not necessarily listened to. Leadership is not about oneself. **Leadership is a ministry for others.** But the human person is very often completely unprepared for this sort of reality, and very little in human society even today or then, either one, actually prepares someone for this. Society prepares people for just the opposite. **Society prepares people to lord it over others.** What do people aspire to? Well some few might aspire to true service, but not many. Just look at the people around you. Look at what you read in the papers, what you see on television, the media, it's all about **people promoting themselves.** This Jesus is trying to tell his disciples is completely wrong.

“Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant.” The word in Greek actually means “slave,” *doúlos*. “Whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom.”