

**25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 19th 2021**  
**A Reflection by Fr Sylvester O’Flynn OFM Cap., Rochestown, Cork**

**I have come to serve**

Last Sunday we completed the first half of the ministry of Jesus and moved into the second stage. “Who do you say I am?” The first half of Mark is complete when Peter recognises him as the Christ, the Anointed One. Jesus is his personal name and Christ is his career name, just as jobs like baker, butcher or smith have become surnames. Now that he has been identified, the second stage of his ministry is about the way or the direction he is taking. He is on the way to Jerusalem where he will be rejected, put to death and rise from the dead. This will also be the way for any follower of Jesus. “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

The journey has begun. In today’s Gospel (Mark 9:30-37) they are still in Galilee and Jesus is giving less time to the large crowds so as to have more time with the apostles. He needs this time with them as they had not taken to heart the message of the cross and resurrection. So, he repeats it. “The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men; they will put him to death; and three days after he has been put to death he will rise again. But they did not understand what he said and they were afraid to ask him”

One can be sympathetic with their difficulty in coming to terms with the unpalatable prospect of the crucifixion. As T S Eliot put it, “Humankind cannot bear very much reality.”

We usually call it denial. How often do we meet with people who cannot see the writing on the wall about a health warning or some unpleasant fact? There are people in denial of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Christian greatness in humble service**

Neither had the apostles taken to heart how the followers of Jesus would be called to follow the same direction by renouncing self-centered living and taking up the cross to follow him. Lagging a little behind him on the road, they were having their own discussion about which of them was the greatest. Jesus had to teach them that his idea of greatness was quite the opposite of worldly greatness. He had no ambition to acquire prosperity, power or prestige. He had set out his ideals in the Beatitudes which identify the blessed people as the poor in spirit, the powerless, people of peace and forgiveness, those who work for justice and those who suffer persecution because of their religion. Pope Francis refers to these Beatitudes as the identity card of a Christian. So, Jesus said to the apostles, “If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all”. Later on, he performed the work of a servant when he washed the feet of the disciples. He had come to serve, not to be served.

**The helpless child**

Jesus took a little child in his arms as he spoke to the disciples. Little children are virtually helpless and need constant care and help. This child in the arms of Jesus represents anybody who needs our help and service. “Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” In other words, how we treat other people is in reality how we treat God.

**A Church of service**

By and large, ever since the time of the Acts of the Apostles down to our own time, the Church has been in the forefront of service to people in need, setting up hospitals, schools, feeding the hungry, liberating captives or working for peace. Whenever I am confronted by somebody

who wants to see the end of the Catholic Church, I mention some of the charitable organizations serving people today: Vincent de Paul, Focus Ireland, Trócaire, Concern, Threshold, Mary's Meals, Peter McVerry Trust, Simon Community ... the list is endless. These and many other agencies of serving have one thing in common: they were all founded by practising Catholics. Is this the Church you want to disappear? Who will replace this variety of Christian service? The vast majority of our charitable organizations were founded by people inspired by Christ's teaching and example. Pope Francis tells us, "True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership of the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness."

### **The road to reforming**

Of course, not everything in Church history has been exemplary. Jesus did warn us that the kingdom would have good crops and dangerous weeds, fish to be taken and fish to be thrown away. There have been many contradictions of the Beatitudes. Wars have been fought in the name of religion, bishops who have lived like princes, a clericalism which exuded an atmosphere of superiority. Hopefully, the forthcoming synods will bring us back to the spirituality of the Beatitudes, our identity card.

A motto in Cursillo (meaning a walk with Christ) is "I am here to serve".

### **Prayer of a Servant**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred let me sow your love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.