

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**A couple weeks ago I gave an absolutely brilliant (at least in my own mind) homily on the importance of listening. I suggested that really listening to another leads us to truly value that person, which opens us to be able to love the one to whom we really listen.**

**St. Mark makes clear to us in our Gospel text today that Jesus disciples were still very far from loving Him because they obviously were not listening to him. Simon Peter had just proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ, the Messiah, the One sent by God. Now Jesus is trying to explain to them what that means: “The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise.”**

**The disciples didn’t have a clue as to what he was talking about and Mark tells us “they were afraid to question him”. That happens a lot in many of our human interactions, doesn’t it? Someone’s heart is broken over the death of a loved one, a separation or divorce, a loved one addicted to drugs or alcohol. We hear the person’s pain, but we don’t know how to respond to it, afraid we might say the wrong thing, or fearful of absorbing the pain within ourselves. So, our tendency might be much like that of the disciples. Change the subject.**

**That’s what the disciples did on the road to Capernaum. They got to arguing about which of them was the greatest. Jesus had just proclaimed that Simon was Peter, the rock upon which he would build his Church. But his brother, Andrew, probably said something like, “I met him first. I led you to him. I’m the greatest!” John then may have piped up, “Now you all know I’m the one he loves the best so I’m really the greatest.” Nathaniel then blurts out, “He said I’m a man without guile, a truly innocent man. I am surely the greatest.” And on and on they went like this.**

**Finally, they get to Capernaum. By then Jesus was truly weary. He was tired of the journey, but he was also tired of listening to them. He sits down with them and asks them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” Although they had a lot to say on the journey, now they had nothing to say. But Jesus had heard them. So, he responds and tells them, “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.” But knowing that they are really dense and doubt that they understand, he picks up a child, places it in their midst, and putting his arms around it, he said to them, “Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me.”**

**Now, this is where we really have to pay attention, my dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ. First of all, we have to understand where did this child come from? Back in the time of Jesus, there was no such thing as abortion. However, when an unwanted child was born into a family, perhaps with too many children to feed or was the result of an inconvenient pregnancy, the new-born child was simply thrown out as refuse or garbage.**

Here we could probably have a healthy discussion on which is more or less humane—throwing a new-born infant out as garbage or slicing and dicing it in its mother’s womb and vacuuming it out as mangled body parts and then throwing it away in the trash. But let’s not digress. The point is the child that Jesus presented to the disciples was just such a child.

It’s also important for us to understand the word that Jesus used that we have translated for us as “receives”. The actual Greek word of the text is “diakonia” which can also be translated as adopted, but usually means in context “to serve”, as a waiter or waitress who serves a meal. It is the word from which the Scriptural understanding of a Deacon, which office was developed in the Church according to the Acts of the Apostles to spare the Apostles from the work of serving the needy and poor.

So, when Jesus says, as our text indicates, “Whoever receives one child such as this...”, he is actually saying, “Whoever serves, that is, takes orders from, a child such as this, takes orders from me, and whoever takes orders from me, takes orders not from me but from the One who sent me.”

With this understanding, one does not need much cultural context to grasp the radical nature of Jesus’ teaching. Parents of every age will put down their work or modify their goals to respond to the needs of their own children, but this is not what He is talking about. He is presenting an unnamed, throw-away person as one worthy of waiting on. Few people in any age or culture would have the humility to take orders from such a person. Yet that is exactly what Jesus is commanding of his disciples.

Like those disciples, many of us seek Jesus in our lives for many reasons—hope, salvation, healing, connection to or communion with one greater than ourselves, a sense of our own worth. All of these are worthy aspirations. But Jesus is telling us today that the true disciple is the one who recognizes in these gifts a call to become like the one who granted them. Those with the humility to wait on the least will be the ones in whom God will find a flawless reflection of His Son.

Prior to this discussion, the disciples of Jesus had probably walked by hundreds, perhaps thousands, of these unwanted, throw-away babies strewn along the highways, without giving them another thought. They were just a fact of life, the way it was, to be taken for granted. After this conversation with Jesus, do you think any of those disciples could have possibly just walked past such a child without seeking to meet its needs?

We might reflect today on who are the throw-away people that we take for granted every day—the mail person, the garbage collector, the school custodian, the noisy neighbor, the tattooed teen, the racially different person, or the non-English speaking immigrant?

**Jesus' radical proposition to us today is that we are not only called to acknowledge and welcome such people into our lives, but we are to wait on them and seek to serve their needs. To do so with true humility will make us the flawless reflections of the Son, with whom God our Father is well pleased.**