

**Do You Want to Be First? Serve. . .**

My Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

In the ninth chapter of Mark that we reflect on today, Jesus offers a profound teaching on humility and service that challenges our human proclivity for power and greatness. As Jesus and his disciples journey through Galilee, he once again reveals to them his destiny: the suffering, death, and resurrection that awaits him. Despite having walked closely with him and hearing his teachings, the disciples still grapple with understanding and embracing his words. Their minds are clouded by their own ambitions, and they remain silent, too afraid to ask for clarity.

After this foretelling of his Passion, an episode unfolds that truly defines our own human imperfections. When the disciples arrive in Capernaum, Jesus asks them what they were discussing on the way. They are silent, embarrassed to admit that they were arguing about who among them was the greatest. Their silence is telling, as it reveals the gap between Jesus's teachings and their understanding of true discipleship. In response, Jesus calls the Twelve to gather around him. What he says next turns the conventional ideas of greatness upside down: "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all." These words are as radical today as they were then. Jesus redefines greatness not as the exercise of power over others, but as the willingness to humble oneself, to serve others selflessly, and to take the lowest place.

Then, Jesus takes a little child and places the child in the disciples' midst. Jesus embraces the child and tells his followers that whoever receives one such child in his name, receives *him*, and ultimately, the One who sent him. In the cultural context of that time, children were seen as the least important members of society, with no status or power. By using the child as an example, Jesus illustrates the kind of humility and openness required of his followers. To welcome the insignificant, to serve the powerless, is to welcome and serve Christ himself.

This teaching calls us to examine our own lives and ambitions. How often do we, like the disciples, find ourselves caught in the pursuit of recognition, status, or power? Jesus invites us to take a different path, one where true greatness is found not in being served but in serving others. This path requires a profound inner transformation, a willingness to embrace humility and to see the face of Christ in those who are marginalized, forgotten, or overlooked. Let us pray for the grace to follow this example in our lives and embody the love of Christ in all our undertakings.

*"The value of a person does not depend any more on the role they have, the work they do, the money they have in the bank. No, no, no, it does not depend on this. Greatness and success in God's eyes are measured differently: they are measured by service. Not on what someone has, but on what someone gives. Do you want to be first? Serve. This is the way. . ."*—Pope Francis, Angelus address, September 19, 2021

Yours in Christ,  
Fr. Rudy