

## Homily- I have come to serve (Mk 10:44)

Today's readings give us an insight into the concept of service. It flows naturally from our reflection last week on mission, and our concern for justice and peace for the poor in the world. In the Gospel, particularly, Jesus wants to teach us about servant leadership. Who here is familiar with that term of servant leadership?

Good leadership is vital to the success of any group or community action. No matter whether that is in a school, a business, a government department, the church, or a sporting team, success and achievement, will rely greatly on the ability of the leader to inspire, encourage, and empower the members of the group.

Lately our media has been full of comments about political leaders. Some might find it amazing that there can be so much criticism of leaders like Malcolm Turnbull, or Kevin Rudd and other members of Parliament, when they are clearly very intelligent and technically competent people. But of course, those of us here who have held positions of authority, will know that exercising leadership of people can be very challenging.

Leaders can be criticized for being too bossy or controlling on the one hand, or too weak or indecisive on the other. Probably the thing that affects people the most, is the leader's level of care and understanding for the people of their group. Those that are followed have a great expectation that their leaders will have their best interests at heart.

When, we lived in England, I heard the story of the tradition of the community at High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire, who conduct a public weigh-in of their Lord Mayor and Councillors every year to check whether they had been getting fat on the public purse. Apparently, 500 years ago if they had put on in the weight while in public service they would have rotten fruit thrown at them. These days, they just get public booing if they have put on weight or acclamation if they have lost weight. That might seem a funny way of saying, that we expect leaders be servants of the community, rather than serving their own interests.

That's of course was the central point that Jesus was making when he responded to James and John in today's Gospel. It seemed like they wanted to be set apart to be glorified with him. Of course, this immediately upset the other 10 disciples. Jesus then pointed out clearly that style of leadership that he wanted them to show was to be different to the pagans, who's so-called rulers, lord it over the people, and make their authority felt. Jesus said, if you want to follow me, you must have been heart of a servant, and live your life in service to others.

More than that, he pointed out that Christian leadership would also involve suffering. I'm conscious that some of the children might not have understood that description of Jesus asking whether the disciples would drink the cup that he must drink. He was saying that Christian leadership would involve sacrifice. Bad people might put some poison in the chalice you drink from. Jesus was also saying – are you prepared to follow me to the cross? – and actually in due course they were martyred. Satan is always try to discourage servant leadership because it so powerful in bringing the Kingdom into being.

Godly leaders will get opposition- its counter – cultural, and because we are always concerned for the poor and marginalized. The rich and selfish are uncomfortable with the poor around them. Just look at the hue and cry about boat people at the moment. There's lots of emotive statements coming out about that issue- but what would Jesus have to say about them – I think he would be

saying we need to be doing more to address the root causes of why these people are fleeing their homelands.

A servant heart cares for people and does something to meet their needs, and in doing so will experience some degree of alienation and discouragement. We comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Servant leadership and following Jesus comes at a cost

In the first reading from Isaiah, the Prophet was trying to encourage people of Israel, exile in Babylon. They too were suffering because of their faith, and he wanted them to know that in due course they would be saved. He wanted them to know that they could trust in the Lord and place their hope in him. So it will be for us if we would take on a role of Christian leadership, or show servant leadership in our workplace and family. Aren't those some great words in the psalm – lord let your mercy be in us as we place our trust in you.

I have seen many different approaches to leadership - in the church, military, and in public service. There is none better than servant leadership- where our dominant motive is grounded in getting the best outcome for our people. Not furthering our own personal interest, nor seeking the highest financial reward, nor wanting to be a control freak. It's very easy to become bossy, and authoritative, and bulldoze your way over people when you are given a position of power or authority. But I have also seen that power corrupts, and absolute power, can corrupt people absolutely.

We as a church embrace servant leadership. The Vatican Council called upon Christian leaders to be humble, charitable, fair and just. Not all church leaders have been faithful to that over the ages. But at the moment in our diocese, we do receive wonderful servant leadership from our shepherds. As we go out into the world, into our workplaces, and even in our homes, an attitude of service should be dominant approach we take in working with others.

I called to mind a wonderful example of servant leadership last Thursday night when a few of us went to dinner with a former member of our parish, whose name is Peter de Haas. Peter worked for many years in St Vincent de Paul in Canberra. He and his wife Angela spent two years as Palms volunteer missionaries in the northern territory. On arrival in our parish he offered to be the first president of Friends and partners with East Timor. He and his wife, had to move to Atherton tableland for the health of their daughter Aliesha. From there Peter has commenced two other charitable activities. One project is placed radios in villages in East Timor. Another has raised funds to support education of aboriginal children, as well as building a disabilities clinic in East Timor. Peter has offered himself for ordained service in the church and will be ordained deacon by the bishop of Cairns early next year. As deacon he will have a role like me to encourage the diakonia of the people (Diakonia is the Greek word meaning service). Actually we are all called to be deacons – to be servants – but some of us receive the sacrament of holy orders to promote that attitude of service among the people of God.

I think we should celebrate that we have lots of service minded people in our parish. Of essence as a church, we are service oriented people and we embrace and promote servant leadership.

I won't be proposing that we have a weigh in each year of our PP and parish councillors, but I do want to encourage us all to continue to embrace servant leadership in the model of Jesus who came not to be served himself, but to serve others and especially those in most need.