

September 22, 2024



Photo by Sr. Karin Nürnberg, CSJ, from the Abbey St. Hildegard in Eibingen, Germany

## THE MAGNITUDE OF SERVICE

By Julie Mussché

### Excerpt from Today's Gospel

*Jesus and his disciples left from there and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it.*

*He was teaching his disciples and telling them,*

*“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.”*

*But they did not understand the saying,*

*and they were afraid to question him.*

*They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, he began to ask them,*

*“What were you arguing about on the way?”*

*But they remained silent.*

*They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest.*

*Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them,*

*“If anyone wishes to be first,*

*he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.”*

**MARK 9:30-35**

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## Reflection

There is quite a bit going in today's Gospel reading. At the beginning, as the group moves stealthily up toward Galilee, Jesus predicts his death for the second time. Naturally, the disciples are confused and do not know how to respond to what Jesus is telling them. Perhaps like many of us who hear from a friend that they have a terminal illness, we simply are speechless or unable to decipher the overwhelming mystery of the news.

Then, as they continue their journey toward their destination, Capernaum, the disciples have a contentious discussion about who is number one, the GOAT, the leader of the pack, who is large and in charge. I can recall many occasions in a work setting where similar conversations and contests ensued. Thinking back, I have to laugh at the hubris of all engaged, particularly myself. Following the reading, Jesus responds to the primacy wrangle with this affirmation: “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.”

Jesus's words are striking as a spiritual direction and, at the same time, hold an expedient truth. As someone who has helped to design and implement organizational and personal leadership development programs and plans, the notion of servant leadership emerges as preferred and contemporary. While the concept was first identified for a business, service or ministry setting by Robert K. Greenleaf over 50 years ago, it appears to have growing significance today. “A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong. While traditional leadership generally involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one at the ‘top of the pyramid,’ servant leadership is different. The servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible.” (<https://www.greenleaf.org/what-is-servant-leadership/>) In this case, a servant-leader is guided first to serve and then lead.

Going back to today's reading, perchance there are times when invitations from Jesus seem more aspirational than attainable. And yet, here we are, 2000 years later, and the idea of servant leadership is meaningful in a very real-world way. To be a follower of Jesus -- many hopes and endless possibilities.

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Jesus Washing Disciple's Foot

Photo by rick734

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## For Pondering

- What catches your attention as you reflect on today's Gospel reading?
- How do you interpret the invitation from Jesus to be last and to serve others? What challenges you, what inspires you?

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## For Prayer

### A Leader's Prayer

*Leadership is hard to define.  
Lord, let us be the ones to define it with justice.  
Leadership is like a handful of water.  
Lord, let us be the people to share it with those who thirst.  
Leadership is not about watching and correcting.*

*Lord, let us remember it is about listening and connecting.  
Leadership is not about telling people what to do.  
Lord, let us find out what people want.  
Leadership is less about the love of power,  
and more about the power of love.*

*Lord, as we continue to undertake the role of leader let us be  
affirmed by the servant leadership we witness in your son Jesus.  
Let us walk in the path He has set and let those who will, follow.*

*Let our greatest passion be compassion.  
Our greatest strength love.  
Our greatest victory the reward of peace.*

*In leading let us never fail to follow.  
In loving let us never fail.*

<https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/leadership-prayers>

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