

Convent: October 2015

Mark 10 35-45

"'. . . whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.'" (Mark 10:43b-44, NRSV).

In Margaret Craven's novel *I Heard the Owl Call My Name*, we follow the story of Fr. Mark Brian, a newly ordained Anglican priest, who has (unbeknown to him) been diagnosed as terminally ill. His bishop knew the true nature of his condition and could have revealed this information to him and allowed him to go home to his family and die. Instead, the bishop sends him to the most difficult parish in his diocese, so that Mark will be able to experience the totality of ministry in a relatively short time.

Mark is assigned a circuit of remote Canadian Indian villages. He must learn to pilot a boat, to fix things for himself when they break, to live among his parishioners as one of them. When the people of Kingcome Village are cold because of severe winter weather, Mark is cold. When there is food in abundance because the salmon are running, and the village is well fed, Mark is well fed. When an ancient cemetery must be relocated, Mark helps to move the bodies of the tribe's ancestors. When members of the village are lost or are in trouble, he joins in seeking them.

Shortly after Mark learns that he is terminally ill, he is mercifully killed in an avalanche while looking for a missing logger. After his body is recovered, the villagers

lovingly anoint him for burial, in his parish, as one of their own.

Margaret Craven's young priest knows what James and John and the rest of us must be taught from this morning's Gospel reading: that trying to be number one is not the way we are called to live in God's . From time to time, we need to hear, with James and John and all the others:

" ' . . . whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.' " (Mark 10:43b-44, NRSV). In other words, we all need to learn the meaning of servanthood.

True servanthood involves sacrifice. By its very nature, it abolishes our need for a "pecking order." Through service, "Jesus constantly calls us to downward mobility" because it means placing God and others first in our lives. James and John were motivated by self-interest. They wanted the crown without the cross, without the commitment that goes with following Christ. Jesus told them that if they are ready to drink from the same cup as him, they must be prepared to accept sacrifice as part of the cost.

This message has a universal application for all Christians. If our faith doesn't involve sacrifice, then what kind of faith do we have? As Jesus said to his disciples, if we hope to drink from the same cup as him, we must be prepared to subordinate our wills to his and choose the role of a servant. With that in mind, are we able to drink from the same cup?