

Father O'Connor's Homily for 20 October 2024  
Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time-B

Isaiah 53: 10-11  
Hebrews 4: 14-16  
Mark 10: 35-45

There is a popular American hymn that was written in 1912 by George Bennard [1873-1958], and it is entitled, "The Old Rugged Cross." Here is the text of its first verse and its chorus:

**On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,**  
The emblem of suffering and shame.  
And I love that old cross where the Dearest and Best  
For a world of lost sinners was slain.

**So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,**  
Till my trophies at last I lay down.  
I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
And exchange it someday for a crown.

With that hymn in mind, a teacher was telling her second-graders that if you carry your cross faithfully here on earth, one day you will wear a crown in heaven. And then she asked, "Who do you think will wear the biggest crown?"

A student answered, "The person with the biggest head."

That sounds a bit like today's Gospel. James and John had pretty big heads – not literally, of course. But they both had large egos. They said to Jesus, "Grant that in your glory we may sit, one at your right and the other at your left."

Are they really so different from us? Don't we all want our moment of fame, our day in the sun?

When no one notices us and our accomplishments, it can feel like being in prison. In fact, someone who did not like their job very much penned these descriptive lines:

In prison, you spend the majority of your day in an 8x10 cell. At work, you spend most of your time in a 6x8 cubicle.

In prison, you get three meals a day. At work, you only get a break for one meal, you have to pay for it, and it tastes like prison food.

In prison, you get time off for good behavior. At work, you get rewarded for good behavior by getting more work to do.

In prison, all expenses are paid by taxpayers, with no work required. At work, you get to pay all the expenses in order to get to work, and then they deduct taxes from your salary to pay for prisoners.

Mary Kay, of Mary Kay Cosmetics, said: “Always remember that everybody wears an invisible sign around their neck that reads, ‘Make me feel important.’ Remember that whenever you interact with people.”

Now, before we get too tough with James and John about their request to sit on either side of Jesus in heaven, we must remember that they were not lightweights in their commitment to Him. They had left behind their father and mother and a very profitable family fishing business to follow Jesus.

And, even in spite of their ego-driven ambition, they did love Jesus. And Jesus knew this. They are like us in many ways, I believe.

Harvey and Patricia lived in Arizona. Adele Astaire was their neighbor and she loved to host dinner parties. Harvey and Patricia were regulars on her guest list. One night, Adele Astaire invited her brother, Fred, to come and join the gathering.

As the evening drew on with a lovely dinner and lots of candlelight and beautiful music, Patricia turned to Fred and said, “Mr. Astaire, would you dance with me?” He graciously got up from the table and they circled the room.

Harvey said that from that day on, whenever they got together with friends, Patricia would always manage to bring up “the night she danced with Fred Astaire.” It was a defining and memorable moment in her life.

When Jesus invited James and John to follow Him, it was a defining and memorable moment in their lives. They believed in Him and they loved Him. But, even so, their ambition sometimes got in the way.

So Jesus says to them, “Can you drink the cup that I drink?” Jesus meant the cup of suffering. “We can,” they replied, not knowing what they were saying.

“The cup that I drink, you will drink,” Jesus told them. And they did. James was the first of the Apostles to give his life for Jesus as a martyr. And his brother, John, was the last of the Apostles to die, and at a very old age.

Their faith started small and it needed to mature. And, little by little, it did. Their ambition needed to be purified. And, in small incremental steps, it was.

And so, I ask you: when was the defining moment in your life when Jesus called you to follow Him, and you said “yes”? Can you remember? And where is Jesus calling you now to further your growth as His disciple?

Whether or not James and John are now seated at Jesus’ right and left hand in heaven, we do not know. We will know someday. But whatever the seating arrangements, we do know that they are indeed with Jesus in heaven.

And, from their place in heaven, they watch over us disciples of Jesus as we strive daily, here on earth, to “cling to the old rugged cross,” hoping, with God’s grace and favor, to “exchange it some day for a crown.”

***An a cappella rendition of “The Old Rugged Cross” by the “Acoustix”:***

<https://youtu.be/80Lhb1Nljag?si=PNK1KdR6jO7FZY00>