

You might or not know, but Mark was the first Gospel written, with Matthew following him. Matthew tells the same story of James and John seeking a place of honor, except with one “minor” change. Does anyone know what Matthew decided “tweak” a bit? Matthew said that it was the mother of James and John who asked Jesus if they could have the places of honor (it’s always the mother to blame!). Matthew was embarrassed, feeling it was unworthy of the disciples so he attributes the ambition to the mother.

The story shows the honesty of Mark. +It is told that a court painter painted a portrait of Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell was afflicted with warts on his face. Thinking to please him, the painter omitted the warts in the painting. When Cromwell saw it, he said, “Take it away! Paint me warts and all!”

It was Mark’s aim to show the disciples warts and all. He was right, because the twelve were not at the time a company of saints, but ordinary men. It was people like ourselves that Jesus set out to change the world and did it.

What is so remarkable was that just prior to this passage Jesus had explained for a 3rd time a most detailed forecast of his death, telling them that he will be condemned to death, handed over, made a mockery of, spit upon, scourged, murdered and then rise on the 3rd day. They missed the fact that *true glory* can mean *suffering* and *great sacrifice*. Words were powerless, because only the very experience would rid them of the idea that a Messiah of earthly power and glory. Only the cross could do that.

The motivational speaker Zig Zigler tells the story of two men in the hot south driving spikes into railroad ties. While at work, a man in the train calls out, “Charlie, is that you, my friend?” They then met and a conversation ensued. He then returned working with his co-worker, who then asked, “Do you know that he is the president of the railroad? How do you know him?” He responded saying, “Twenty-five years ago both of us began work at the railroad.” To which his friend said, “If you and the president started out swinging hammers together and you are here and he is the president, what happened?” Charlie replied simply, “Twenty five years ago I came to work for \$1.25 an hour, but he came here to work for the railroad.” Think on that a bit.

James and John came to work for self-interest – for glory to be paid, but Jesus wanted them to work for the kingdom. Imagine if Pat Carlin had a special organ that he played at concerts and that it had a special button that he could press for applause – the standing ovation kind of applause. No matter how he played, he would just press that button and he would get all the accolades he ever wanted. James and John wanted that kind of button – they wanted the applause, but not the cross.

Patrick Carlin has worked 25 years at this Cathedral, for love of music and ministry (surely not for the money!) If you have ever witnessed his concerts, they are something to behold. But when it is done, he zips out that side door back there. And yet the applause always follows him. That is the very paradox of Jesus’ message: renounce it and you will gain it.

It is perfectly natural to seek some self interest in what we do in life – everyone wants to be appreciated and recognized. The point, however, is we can't stop there. Stopping there means stagnating in the self and that always ends up empty.

There has to be a higher goal outside of oneself to find true fulfillment in being a follower of Christ. It means drinking the cup of self-denial. It means dying to the self and to rise in service of the other. It means embracing the paradox that whoever wishes to be master must learn to be servant.

This is obviously very difficult to do in a world that constantly promotes serving one's own selfish interest. Do you know what the irony is of famous people? They fight half their life trying to be famous, fighting to be recognized. However, once they reach this fame, they end the rest of their lives wearing dark sunglasses, avoiding being recognized. And they discover that their life is imprisoned, empty and without purpose because it is all based on the self.

The way of Jesus, on the other hand, stresses that when we put more into life than we take out, we will find true happiness and purpose. To be truly great and find honor with Jesus is learning how to be in service to one another. For Jesus, greatness does not consist in reducing others to service, but in reducing oneself to their service. And there lies true glory and power.

Do you recall Tom Brokaw calling the World War II generation the greatest generation? He did so because that generation encapsulated Jesus' very message of being in service for one another, sacrificing the self in the process. One powerful example...

It was the early morning Feb. 3, 1943, and the U.S.A.T. Dorchester was crowded to capacity, carrying 902 service men, merchant seamen and civilian workers. The Dorchester, one of three ships in the convoy, was moving steadily across the icy waters from Newfoundland toward an American base in Greenland. It was very dangerous waters, as German U-boats were constantly prowling these vital sea lanes, and several ships had already been blasted and sunk.

The Dorchester was now only 150 miles from its destination, but the captain ordered the men to sleep in their clothing and keep life jackets on. Many soldiers sleeping deep in the ship's hold disregarded the order because of the engine's heat. Others ignored it because the life jackets were uncomfortable.

At 12:55 a.m., a periscope broke the chilly Atlantic waters. Through the cross hairs, an officer aboard the German submarine U-boat spotted the Dorchester. The order was given to fire torpedoes and a fan of three was fired. The one that hit was decisive--and deadly--striking the starboard side, amid ship, far below the water line.

The order was given to abandon ship. In less than 20 minutes, the Dorchester would slip beneath the Atlantic's icy waters. Aboard the Dorchester, panic and chaos had set in. The blast had killed scores of men, and many more were seriously wounded. Others, stunned by the explosion were groping in the darkness. Those sleeping without clothing rushed topside where they were confronted first by a blast of icy Arctic air and then by the knowledge that death awaited.

Men jumped from the ship into lifeboats, over-crowding them to the point of capsizing, according to eyewitnesses. Other rafts, tossed into the Atlantic, drifted away before soldiers could get in them.

Through the pandemonium, according to those present, four Army chaplains brought hope in despair and light in darkness. Quickly and quietly, the four chaplains spread out among the soldiers. There they tried to calm the frightened, tend the wounded and guide the disoriented toward safety.

Witnesses of that terrible night remember hearing the four men offer prayers for the dying and encouragement for those who would live.

One witness, Private Bednar, found himself floating in oil-smeared water surrounded by dead bodies and debris. "I could hear men crying, pleading, praying," Bednar recalls. "I could also hear the chaplains preaching courage. Their voices were the only thing that kept me going."

Another sailor, tried to reenter his cabin but one of the chaplain's stopped him. The sailor, concerned about the cold Arctic air, explained he had forgotten his gloves. "Never mind, responded the chaplain. "I have two pairs." The chaplain then gave the petty officer his own gloves. In retrospect, the sailor realized that the chaplain was not conveniently carrying two pairs of gloves, and that the chaplain had decided not to leave the *Dorchester*.

By this time, most of the men were topside, and the chaplains opened a storage locker and began distributing life jackets. When there were no more lifejackets in the storage room, the chaplains removed theirs and gave them to four frightened young men. They did not ask about rank or religious affiliation, for they simply gave their life jackets to the next man in line.

As the ship went down, survivors in nearby rafts could see the four chaplains--arms linked and braced against the slanting deck. Their voices could also be heard offering prayers. That night the chaplains passed life's ultimate test. In doing so, they became an enduring example of extraordinary faith, courage and selflessness.

To that generation Jesus could ask: "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" They could certainly answer: "We can" for they did so for all of us. The question is can our generation answer in the same way?