

October 19, 2009 – the Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
The Very Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder

Mark 10:35-45

“Lord, take my lips and speak through them; take my mind and think through it; take my heart and set it on fire for your Holy Gospel.” +Amen.

I recently read these words spoken by a little child on line in an elementary school cafeteria, *Hot lunch always sounds a lot better than it tastes.* How true that was when I was in school! For the sons of Zebedee, James, and John, it sounded a lot better to be seated at Jesus’ right hand and left than it really was—for to get there was not only God’s decision, but meant taking on the very nature of Jesus Christ. Certainly James and John did not understand this as they asked Jesus to do whatever they wanted, *‘Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.’ (Mark 10:35)*

When I was a little boy, I suppose I was pretty much like most little children when they found themselves in a department store with their mother or father. I was somehow always able to find something, usually a toy, which I absolutely had to have at that very moment; my life depended on it. And nine times out of ten, I did not get it, regardless of whether I cried or carried on. When we would go to the grocery store, I continued this behavior with regards to picking out the breakfast cereal. I would always want to choose the cereal based upon which one had the best toy inside the box. My mother would always say, *Philip if you choose that cereal, I will make sure that you finish the whole box.* And nine times out of ten, that’s exactly what my strict German mother did. The grace that came through all of this was that I

learned from a very young age that one doesn't always get that for which they ask. In fact usually you don't get it at all. I would venture a guess that most of you have had this same teaching from a very early age as well.

What is it about that teaching that does not translate as well into our prayer and Christian faith lives? Ask yourself the question, *Do I expect God and the Church to give me what I ask for?* God, I want healing in my life. Jesus, I need you to find me a new job. Lord, make this relationship better. Why can't we always sing my favorite hymns? Why am I expected to give a significant percentage of my income to God through the Church? I will be a part of the church, but only if it believes this...or repudiates this...or does this...or gives me this...*Do you expect God and the Church to give you what you want?*

The disciples had that growing expectation of getting what they wanted from Jesus Christ and their relationship to God the Father. This was the path that they were venturing down in today's Gospel, and it is very understandable because in our humanity and struggles we often venture that way as well. I want what I want.

Henri Nouwen writes in his book Here and Now of an encounter with Mother Teresa at a time of his great personal struggle with depression. He writes, *When after ten minutes of my elaborate explanation, I finally became silent, Mother Teresa looked at me quietly and said, 'Well, when you spend one hour a day adoring your Lord and never do anything which you know is wrong...you will be fine.'* When she said this I realized suddenly that she had punctured my big balloon of self-complaints and pointed me far beyond

myself to the place of real healing. (P.106-107) This is exactly the invitation that Christ issues to James and John—to come into his presence not asking for anything, but instead to drink from his cup and be baptized with him. *The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized...*

You are being asked to move away from asking for things from God and the Church, to instead living in the presence of God and embracing the major life transformation that happens. Has Jesus become your model for living, or do you just visit with him for an hour or so on Sundays? Former Notre Dame and USC coach, Lou Holz once remarked, *If there's anyone I want to model myself after it would be Him (Jesus Christ). But I don't do a very good job at it. (Quotable Lou, p. 20)*

In this morning's Gospel story it concludes with Jesus proclaiming that he did not come to be served by others, but rather to serve—in fact, to give his very life. And that is exactly what God in Jesus Christ is asking of you—when we are transformed by Jesus our question moves from “what's in it for me,” to, “how may I serve others in the Kingdom of God?” Are you ready to move from the question of what's in it for me, to how may I give and serve? Maybe you are already on your way. **AMEN.**