

Sunday, September 23, 2018

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Grace, mercy and Peace to you through God our Father, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, and His Holy Spirit. Amen!

A story is told about a woman we will call Martha. She had worked for many years in a large downtown business office. Many different things were said about Martha, but there was one thing all of her colleagues agreed on: Martha was a very unlikeable, arrogant and self-centered person.

Martha had a way of quickly turning off anyone who tried to “work” with her. She was so arrogant that she believed she knew more than anyone else and was very disagreeable with other employees, even her boss. And when a new employee was hired, the warning went out very quickly: "Stay away from Martha!!!"

This situation went on for many years, until a new employee named Sally arrived on the scene. Sally disregarded all of the warnings about Martha and she made a very special effort to let her know there was someone in the office who really cared about her. Slowly Martha began acting differently; she relaxed and began asking others for their opinion and even developed one or two friendships.

Then early one morning, the whole office was shocked to learn that Sally had died suddenly in her sleep. When Martha was given the news, she cried and cried and said over and over again, **"SHE WAS THE ONLY CHRIST I EVER KNEW!!!!"**

Isn't that a powerful statement: "She was the only Christ I ever knew!!!" What did she mean by that? What was Martha trying to say about this special person named Sally?

Our Gospel lesson this morning gives a clue to this powerful statement from Martha. Jesus told His disciples a second time what was going to happen to Him when he arrived at Jerusalem. He told them he would be delivered into the hands of men, and they would kill him and then after three days he would rise again. But unlike the first time he said this, the disciples did not understand what he was saying or actually meant.

Instead they were working on **their own agenda**. They were discussing who would be first in this new kingdom that Jesus was bringing into fruition. They were wondering who would be the ones who would sit on Jesus' right and left hands, the places of power and authority.

If we think in terms of our modern government, they were wondering who was going to be Vice-President, the Chief of Staff, the Secretary of Defense, and who was going to be Secretary of State with Jesus being the President.

Jesus having sensed they did not understand **at all** about this new kingdom - called the disciples together and explains that the places of honor in this kingdom were not the places of power, fame and wealth - as in other kingdoms! You see, the place of honor in this kingdom of Jesus Christ - would be place of servant- hood, the last place in line. Jesus was explaining to the disciples that his true followers would make sacrifices themselves - for this new kingdom; they would fillfill the role of servants, which is about ministry and consideration of others.

Then Jesus asks a child to come forward and he said that - one must be as innocent, as trusting, as non-judgmental, as naive, as a child who lives in God's kingdom.

You see, Jesus was telling the disciples that one must be willing to serve out of the same kind of love and concern that a child has for her or her parents, a love that is trusting, a love that is simple, and a love that is accepting.

Now if we would think back to our story about Martha and Sally, we can see why Martha called Sally the only Christ I ever knew;

Sally was willing to give of herself; she was not willing to see only the bad side of Martha, but Sally believed in HER HEART that Martha had a good side and she was going to work at bringing it out.

So what if we were to become "LIKE SALLY"? What if we were as determined with people that we view as difficult, self-centered and arrogant?

But even before that, what **change would need to take place in our hearts...** so we could become like SALLY?

I imagine that at the beginning, Sally took a lot of abuse from Martha, because Martha probably did not understand what was going on. But the more Sally treated Martha with love, mercy and compassion, the more Martha responded, the more she came to trust, love and accept this person who was willing to risk herself to help this very self-centered, unloving person.

So here is the point: Sally was Christ for Martha. Sally was willing to **give of herself** so that Martha might possibly see and experience God's peace, contentment, happiness and love in her life.

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You see, we must never give up on anyone, but we must first get our own lives in order with God's grace... with a commitment to a life of servanthood that is willing to bear insults, anger and even rejection.

This kind of living as a Christian is not easy. But living a life of sacrifice was never intended to be easy, but (LISTEN) it is the way of the cross, it is the way of Jesus who is our Master, Lord and Leader!

So, in today's Gospel, we see and hear Jesus calling us to a life of self-sacrifice and service, a life where we are called to serve God and anyone around us, including our family and friends. Amen