

Dear Parishioners,

This week we hear yet another profound and challenging message from Jesus that makes us want to squirm in our seats, *"If anyone wants to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all."* This is a lesson that has been difficult for me to learn. I know people expect their priests to be the "servant of all;" but in order for that to happen, the priest must be motivated by a desire to **BE** the servant of all. This has not always been my desire.

When I was a seminarian studying at St. Meinrad School of theology in the mid 1980's, my motivation to become a priest had very little to do with being a servant of all God's people. When my parents and the sisters at school told us the parish priests deserved all the respect we could give them, I interpreted their message in this way: priests are a lot more like kings than they are servants. The lesson my parents and teachers were trying to teach was very important, but how I interpreted their message was, to say the least, inaccurate.

In my mind I saw priests as very powerful, popular, and tremendously important people. When they spoke people did whatever they commanded. I saw parishioners take their priests out to eat at the finest restaurants; priests were allowed to golf for free; they drove nice cars; they always seemed to have a lot of money; and more than anything else, they had the esteem of the people. I always thought people gave priests so much respect because they were so highly educated and because they were so powerful. When I was 23 years old and studying to be a priest, this was my motivation. At the age of 27, when this motivation had not changed, I was asked to prayerfully consider leaving the seminary because with only one year left of school I was not ready to be ordained.

So I took two more years off. I quit the seminary, and got a full time job working at St. Mary Parish in Oregon. Fr. Bill Budden was my boss. He taught me a lot about the priesthood and by watching him, my

perspective began to change. While I was in Oregon I also got a part time job working at a residential facility known as Stouffer Terrace, where we worked with very special adults who were mentally retarded. Each one of the residents was unique and, while each had different levels of skill and dependency, they were among the most loving people I had ever known in my life.

My job was to take the younger male adults, who were higher in their abilities to function, to the Nash Center to workout. I was a weight lifter at the time and was able to show them some easy exercises that they really enjoyed. A couple of the male residents were much lower in their abilities to function; and I had to help them with showers, dress them, feed them, and give them their medication. I was so amazed to discover how much I enjoyed that work. In retrospect, I can honestly say they gave me far more than I gave them. They taught me far more than I could teach them. They taught me how to love. They taught me how to be a servant.

Through the arrogance of my ego and the weaknesses of my character defects it is, regrettably, easy for me to take these lessons for granted. That old thinking about the king priest ~ the powerful and important leader of the parish ~ creeps back in and expresses itself in painful ways. So, I am still learning the lesson, *"If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be last of all and the servant of all."* I thank you for your willingness to continue teaching me. But, I know I still have a long way to go.

In joyful hope,

Fr. Tim Seigel,  
Pastor