

THE PASTOR'S POST

GREAT...GREATER...GREATEST!

Dear Parish Family

Who does not want to be the greatest? We see this word throughout history in many contexts and moments. Leaders are referred to as "the Great". Even in the Church, we often add "the Great" to the names of some saints. For example, today, I read a reflection from St. Gertrud the Great. We see the word appear in advertising campaigns, self-help movements, and even political campaigns.

Jesus does not seem all that interested in the same kind of greatness. If you're not sure, read today's Gospel again. We better be careful, like the disciples in today's Gospel, of the words we choose. Even more, we need to consider where they come from as James challenges us to do in today's second reading.

Let's consider what happens. Jesus catches the disciples essentially gossiping and arguing about who was the greatest. What prompts such a conversation? I suppose Jesus' warning about the significance of the cross and suffering that might come. There are changes on the horizon. Things are going to be different than what they thought. So what do they do? I imagine they do what I often do, and perhaps you: consider all the reasons they are better than this and better than others in this particular moment, i.e. great. Filled with fear, they resort to self-preservation, filled with uncertainty, they try to hold onto the titles and statuses of this world, of their own worlds.

Don't we see that in our own world today? I cannot help but think of the recent hurt and pain caused by an unfounded social media post amplified by others about Haitian immigrants. Particularly as we enter National Migration Week, I see that pain in so many of our parishioners from Haiti and from other lands. I see and hear about it from the students in our school. That post and what has followed has unleashed a range of emotions and reactions. Some are positive, based in deep compassion for the plight of the immigrant. Others are concerned about the safety of those who come to this nation. Others,

unfortunately, are using this as an opportunity to spread words of unfounded fear, hateful prejudices, and harmful actions.

Let's go back to James! He says, "Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members?"

Perhaps when we look at some of these comments and their impact as well as many of things that we can say, spread, post, follow, etc. we are best to ask ourselves

where they come from. Are they coming from a place of genuine love, from a willingness to be "last" as the Gospel calls us, from a place of innocence and service? Or like the disciples and some of us, are they coming from a place of fear or even a darker passion or a desire for greatness by the world's standards and not the Gospel's?

As I write this letter on Wednesday, my next project after this letter is to write a homily for tonight's Wednesday night Spanish Mass. (Great will not be a word to describe it, I am sure!). The first reading at Mass tonight will be the famous reading about love from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. We are familiar with it, no? "Love is patient...Love is kind...Love never fails." I still have to pull together some ideas but maybe getting to the right sense of greatness is not as complicated as we can make things, even when we look at the present state of affairs in our country and world. Am I doing all I can to love - to love God and to love one another? Anything that I am doing, saying, sharing, posting, following that does not fall into one of those two categories - loving God, loving neighbor - needs to go and go quickly so a new space can be created within us...a space for greatness. It will never be about the greatness of things in this world like the disciples were grabbing onto and that we can grab on to as well.

It will be about the cross and the revelation of the greatest of these...the gift of love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Please pray for me. I promise the same.

Father Jim

