

29 B

The Abbot in a particular monastery thought that three of his monks were suffering from the sin of pride. So he summoned them to his study and asked them in turn to explain themselves. The first one said apologetically: "I'm a nobody". The second also said: "I'm also a nobody". And the third one looked with disdain at the other two and said: "Well, well, look who think they're nobodies".

James and John seem to be overplaying their importance by requesting that Jesus should give them the best seats in heaven. The other apostles understandably felt irate at the pushiness of the two brothers.

This provided Jesus with an ideal opportunity to teach them a very important lesson. They must avoid the power games which people play in the world. At the last Supper, as a gesture of humility, Jesus washed the apostles' feet and asked them to copy what He had done. If you remember, Peter refused and Jesus told him bluntly that if he wasn't prepared to 'eat humble pie, their friendship was terminated.

Today is designated as World Mission Sunday. Jesus sent the apostles out on a mission to preach the gospel. But their words will only resonate with people who have the same spirit of humbleness as Jesus 'who did not come to be served but to serve'. James and John were pressing Jesus to reserve seats for them at the top table in Heaven without having to 'muddy their hands', as it were, here on earth. Humble service of others is very much tied up with taking on a subservient role which doesn't come naturally. However, without fully realising it, most of us take our responsibilities towards others 'in our stride' without much 'song or dance'. Look at all the humble, often unnoticed tasks you do week after week for others both within and outside your family without seeking any reward.

Even The Church itself has not been immune from playing power games. At a clergy meeting recently one of the talks was about the influence which the Second Vatican Council has had on the Church over the past 50 years. Well I would say that we are a more chastened, less triumphalist church now than in the past. During the Holy Father's trip to America a couple of years ago, for instance, he travelled about in an ordinary little car to be more in tune with the ordinary man and woman in the street.

Service towards others, however, doesn't at all mean devaluing our vocation or downplaying our talents. It is false humility not to acknowledge the gifts God has given us.

Missionary activity always involves the humiliation of the Cross. That is why Jesus asked James and John if they were prepared to drink the cup of suffering and humiliation which He was soon to drink. If not, they might be merely on an ego trip and overlook the real needs of those whom they were sent to serve.

*Worldly leaders tend to 'push their weight around' as Jesus said but we, **his** followers, are advised not to go down that road. Otherwise our mission to spread the Gospel becomes a hike to nowhere.*