

Go Forth...

A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

VOLUNTARY GIFT OF SELF



SUNDAY READINGS:

Ezekiel 18:25-28

Psalms 25:4-9

Philippians 2:1-11

Matthew 21:28-32

IMITATING THE KENOSIS OF JESUS

Today as the second reading, the Church gives us a beautiful Christological hymn from Saint Paul; we always hear this same reading on Palm Sunday. Philippians 2:1-11 speaks about the *kenosis*, the “self-emptying” of Jesus. While maintaining the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus, Paul says that Jesus

voluntarily condescended and “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (v. 7); he did this in profound humility and freely accepted death on a cross. God the Father has exalted Jesus through the resurrection; Jesus is Lord and Savior of the world.

Voluntary Acceptance of Suffering. Turning to the Apostle Paul, we note that he preached the Gospel by his life and example. We know that *vulnerability and acceptance of the cross authenticate mission*. In imitation of Christ who gave himself up to death—even for sinners (Rom 5:8), Paul considers his suffering for the sake of the Gospel as a participation in the sufferings of Christ (2 Cor 1:5-7). Paul saw himself sharing in Christ’s *kenosis* (Phil 2:6-11) as he endured suffering. Writing to Timothy, he says: “... join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling” (2 Tim 1:8-9).

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Paul recounts his numerous trials in the service of the Gospel; he mentions his imprisonments, beatings, shipwrecks, travels, robberies, hard labor, sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, and nakedness (cf. 2 Cor 11:23-27). Paul notes, “I am quite content with my weaknesses, and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and the agonies I go through for Christ’s sake. For it is when I am weak that I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10). Can we like Paul say: “May I never boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal 6:14)?

Genuine Leadership. In his book entitled *Servant Leadership*, Robert Greenleaf sought to describe the characteristics of an authentic leader, coining the term “servant leadership.” However, in the eyes of this world, “servant leadership” is seen as a contradiction in terms. Why? Because so often in this world, servants do not lead, and leaders do not serve. Not so in the world of Jesus!

We all know that Satan’s motto is: “*Non serviam*. I will not serve.” And, those who are under Satan’s spell will tend to “Lord it over others” and “Make their importance felt.” We need to have the attitude of John the Baptist, who said: “He must increase; I must decrease” (Jn 3:30). We can only effectively act in imitation of Jesus if we learn the *kenosis* (“self-emptying”) of servanthood. In this way, we become authentic models of Christ’s call to generously serve our neighbors, following Paul’s exhortation: “Have this same attitude in you that was in Jesus” (Phil 2:5).

An Invitation. Friends, during our journey through life, we endeavor to deeply appreciate Jesus’ call to *kenosis*, voluntary self-emptying, and genuine, humble service. We recall the oft-quoted words of Pope Francis: “Let us never forget that authentic power is service”!

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NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading: Ezekiel 18:25-28

The Old Testament Book of Ezekiel was written six centuries before Christ; Ezekiel was the dramatic prophet of the Babylonian Captivity. The captives often blamed their troubles on others—their ancestors, their enemies, or even God. The prophet teaches that every individual is responsible for his or her life. Ezekiel invites us to ask: whose way is unfair?

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 25:4-9

Today's psalm is actually a prayer asking for God's mercy. We pray: "Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior." We petition: "Remember that your compassion, O Lord, and your kindness are from of old." Indeed, we never tire repeating: "Remember your mercies, O Lord."

Second Reading: Philippians 2:1-11

Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians is probably his loveliest. Presumably, it was written when Paul was under house arrest in Rome (63 AD). Paul begs his beloved Philippians to be united and humble. To show Christ's humility, Paul quotes a hymn which asserts that God emptied himself (*kenosis*) to become our Savior. This is a pivotal text for appreciating Jesus Christ's identity and person.

Gospel: Matthew 21:28-32

The Gospel of Matthew has five narrative sections, each followed by a challenging "sermon." Today's Gospel, from the fifth section, is a devastating condemnation of the Jewish religious leaders. They are told that even people considered irreligious (tax collectors and prostitutes) are better than these "religious professionals." Truly, when appropriate, Jesus was "brutally honest" when condemning false religiosity and self-righteousness, calling for genuine repentance.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who recently published three short, meditative books: ► **Living in Joyful Hope**, ► **Exploring Vatican II Treasures**, and ► **A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis** (www.faithalivebooks.com).

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