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**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent 2020**  
*Hebrews 9:11-14 & Mark 10: 32-45*

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The best way to discover one's lack of knowledge, is to just let them keep talking. Seriously, if you want to succeed in life, know your abilities and accept your limitations. This doesn't mean we should constantly put ourselves down, but that we avoid fooling ourselves about our strengths and weaknesses. Just use what talents you have! The woods would be very silent if no birds sang there except those that sang best.

Today's Gospel tells us about two apostles, James and John who wanted to sit in a special place at Jesus' right and left hand in His kingdom. Here James and John saw a way to overcome their low standing in society. They had their mother ask Jesus for the highest positions in His coming kingdom.

They wanted the reward but not the risk. They were asking for the crown without the cross, fulfilling their desires with no commitment. But commitment, as we know, includes the cross. They are two sides of the same coin. Her is a good example of commitment.

A woman rushed up to famed violinist Fritz Kreisler after a concert and cried: "I'd give my life to play as beautifully as you do." Kreisler replied, "I did." If you make a commitment of any kind, the cross is never far behind.

The two apostles, James and John, didn't understand that. That's why Jesus asked them somewhat sarcastically if they could make a commitment and all that goes with it! That's the only way you will be able to sit at my right and my left in my kingdom.

James and John had no qualms asking Jesus for a favour. The disciples of Jesus believed that Jesus could do anything. Thinking back on the things they had seen Jesus do, explains why they acted as they did. They had seen him change water into wine. They saw Him feed thousands of people with a boy's lunch. They observed Him raise Lazarus from the dead. Anyone who could do these things could do anything! Jesus could re-establish Israel's power and importance in the world. He could restore the glory days of King David. They had total confidence in Jesus. Therefore, James and John asked Jesus for the two places of honor, one on his right hand and one on his left, when he came to power.

The disciples did not understand the nature of Jesus' kingdom. All their lives they had waited for the Messiah to appear. The Messiah would be a nationalistic military conqueror, who would destroy Israel's enemies and rule as God's anointed one. They were no different in that idea from the rest of the Jews. Jesus responded to their request by saying, "You do not know what you are asking." He asked if they could drink his cup and endure his baptism, referring to his suffering and death. Still thinking in military terms, they said, "We are able." Such moments must have been very discouraging to Jesus.

Then Jesus showed them the divine beauty of the selfless servant. Jesus' limits were self-imposed. They were the limitations of obedience to God and of love. He said greatness in His kingdom is not in ruling, but in serving. The "Son of man came not to be served but to serve," He said, "and to give his life as a ransom for many."

We humans have at least two kinds of limitations. First, there are our given limitations. Some of these we have in common with all humans, and some we have because each of us is an unique individual. We should never underestimate our potential or shy away from challenges but know and accept our limitations. When we know our weaknesses, and guard against them, they become our strengths. A sign of spiritual maturity is being realistic about both one's capabilities and one's limitations. Faith involves accepting our limits in relation to God's sovereign power.

Second, we all have self-imposed limitations. Here our values and our faith come into play. If we respect the individuality and freedom of another person, we won't try to control or dominate that person. We

do that based on the Golden Rule. If we genuinely believe in the importance of truth and goodness, we will regard lying and evil as off-limits to us. If marriage partners believe in the sanctity of their vows, they will stake out limits. If, for health's sake, we commit ourselves to weight loss and fitness, we will build fences around fast foods and ice cream.

As the new coronavirus COVID-19 continues to spread around the world, an increasing number of people have been told to self-quarantine. While some have tested positive for the virus, others have simply been exposed to it and have been advised to self-quarantine as a precaution. Self-imposed limitations function, not to punish us, but to enhance and enrich our lives.

Jesus didn't impose limitations on himself because he found pleasure in suffering. Jesus' self-imposed limits were free choices, made with the knowledge that obedience to God's will was the only way to experience life at its best. Jesus knew that love for God and love for the neighbor, far from being burdensome obligations, led to the highest joy. Pursuing excellence and the desire for success are morally neutral. What makes them worthy or unworthy is the goal desired or pursued. That is the reason a popular singer who recently went from rags to riches was quoted as saying, "I still don't understand it. If you don't have any time for yourself, any time to hunt or fish, that's success." Jesus saw greatness in servanthood. Let us pursue the common good, rather than advantage for ourselves.

A familiar psychological definition of personal maturity is the ability to delay gratification. Maturity involves living with certain self-imposed limitations. The child in each of us struggles with this idea, and yet such limitations are for our own happiness and growth. Perhaps the best-known self-imposed limitation is what we call the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." Ironically, when Jesus calls us to serve one another, he is showing us the way to fulfillment and joy.

Amen!