

29th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

I am sure that we can all relate to James and John to some degree, and indeed to the reaction of the other disciples. In fact, from school days and even prior to this in family dynamics there are rivalries. So often we are comparing ourselves to others in one way or another. As so often in the gospels, Jesus has to explain that in his kingdom, which is true reality, things are viewed and experienced in a completely different way.

Sadly, even in the Church there have been examples of leadership being exercised in a worldly way, where ministers in positions of authority have ended up lording it over people and making their authority felt. Even worse than this, we are all very aware now of the sickening abuse that has, in some cases, even been institutional.

At the root of our sin, I believe, is an insecurity. It is a lack of trust in the unconditional love of God. Instead of finding our true worth in Him, we seek it elsewhere such as in worldly success, for example. We strive for whatever we think will help us to achieve self-worth and success in our lives which inevitably involves clinging to control of our lives. Conversely, when we truly trust God and know His love for us, we can gradually allow Him to take the lead in our lives.

Such was Jesus' knowledge of the love of the Father that he could place himself completely under the Father's authority. Surely Jesus loved others in the same way that he himself experienced the Father's love. In fact, he says of himself to Philip, *'To have seen me is to have seen the Father.'*¹ Such a secure love made it possible for Jesus to exercise his authority in service. No worldly achievement or power could possibly compare with the unconditional love, affirmation and security that Jesus experienced in God the Father.

Today's gospel message does not just apply to church leaders, but to anyone in a position of authority, whether that be at home, at work, or elsewhere. In order to exercise authority in the way that Jesus demands, we must first dispose ourselves to experiencing the love of God personally, to live out of this love, and to seek to place our trust completely in God as the provider of everything. We have no need to look for fulfilment or recognition from outside. These are given by God as a free gift from within. The exercise of authority is then about communicating the love, care, respect and honour that we have received to those in our charge. Someone who lives out of such a secure place in God is then empowered to lay down their life freely for others: *'Anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all. For the Son of Man himself did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'*

God bless,

Fr Andy

¹ John 14:9.