

“Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.” (Mark 10:43-44).

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and for the third time he was trying to prepare his disciples for the dramatic event of his passion and death. However, the very men who had followed him most closely seem incapable of comprehending the reality of what he was saying.

In fact, conflict ensues among the apostles themselves: James and John ask to occupy places of honor “in his glory.”¹ The other ten were indignant and angry, and the group is divided. Jesus patiently calls them all together, and once again explains that his message is one that turns everything upside down! He told them:

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In this sentence from Mark’s Gospel, we notice that Jesus is gradually leading us from being a willing servant to a limited, secure group of people to becoming a “slave” to everyone, meaning being totally dedicated to all people without exception.

It is a proposal that is definitely the opposite of the common mentality, which considers people in authority or in government to have power over others. This new concept of service captivated the apostles and is attractive to us as well.

Perhaps this is the secret of Christian love?

“One word in the Gospel that is not emphasized enough by us Christians is ‘serve.’ It might seem to be old-fashioned, unworthy of the dignity of human beings who give, but also receive. And yet it is central to the Gospel, which is all about love. In fact, to love means to serve. Jesus did not come to command, but to serve. (...) To serve, to serve one another, is the heart of Christianity, and those who live it with simplicity - and everyone can do this - have done all that is necessary. And they do not remain alone, because since love is the essence of Christian life, it spreads like a blaze of fire.”²

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The encounter with Jesus in his Word opens our eyes, as it did for the blind man, Bartimaeus, whose story is found right after this Word of Life.³ Jesus frees us from our narrow vision and allows us to contemplate the horizons of God himself, of his plan for “new heavens and a new earth.”⁴

1. Cf. Mk 10:37.

2. Chiara Lubich, *Serving*, in “Città Nuova” magazine, December 1973 [in Italian, our translation].

3. Cf. Mk 10:46-52.

4. Cf. Is 65:17, 66:22; taken up in 2 Pet 3:13.

Jesus washed the feet of others⁵ and by his example upended the often rigid practice in society, and even in religious environments, of relegating the task of physical service to a certain class of people. Christians, therefore, should imitate the example of Jesus, and learn from him a new style of life in society, which is to make oneself a “neighbor” to each person we encounter, whatever their social or cultural condition may be.

As Giovanni Anziani, a Methodist pastor of the Waldensian Church, suggests, “[...] By agreeing to place our trust and our hope in the Lord, who is the servant of the many, the Word of God asks us to act in our world and in the midst of all its contradictions, as people who work for peace and justice, as bridge-builders who facilitate reconciliation among nations.”⁶

This is also how Igino Giordani, author, journalist, politician and family man, lived in an historical moment in Italy marked by a dictatorship. To describe his experience, he wrote: “Politics is - in the most dignified Christian sense—a ‘servant’ and should not become a ‘master,’ nor should it abuse, dominate or dictate. Its function and dignity is to be of service to society, to be charity in act, to be the highest form of love for one’s homeland.”⁷

Through the witness of his life, Jesus proposes to us a conscious and free choice. Rather than living withdrawn into ourselves and our own interests, we are asked to “live the life of the other,” feeling what they feel, carrying their burdens and sharing their joys.

We all have small or large responsibilities and spheres of authority. These may be in the field of politics or in other areas of society, such as in our families, schools or faith communities. Let’s take advantage of our “places of honor” to put ourselves at the service of the common good, creating just and compassionate human relationships with everyone.

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5 Cf. Jn 13:14.

6. CF. https://www.chiesavaldese.org/aria_covers.php?ref=111

7. P. Mazzola (ed.), *Pearls of Igino Giordani* [in Italian, our translation], Effatà Editrice, Turin, Italy, 2019, p. 112.

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