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25th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Interior Peace Comes from Seeking the Glory of God, not of self

"The last will be first, and the first will be last." Christ tells this parable right after Peter asked him what the twelve Apostles will get in return for having given up everything to follow Jesus. The parable itself most obviously applies to the Jewish nation in general. The Jews were God's Chosen People, the first nation on earth to receive God's revelation. They are the workers who were hired at daylight. But when the eternal Kingdom appears in all its fullness at the end of history, others will be honored by God maybe even more, just as the first workers found the latecomers were treated - the last will be first. The parable is also a warning to the Apostles. They too were given a special role in the history of salvation. They were chosen to be the visible foundation of the Catholic Church, but in the end, others will achieve greatness in Christ's name as well - the first will be last. God has plans that we do not always understand. As it says in our First Reading today, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways." So why does Jesus issue this warning? He does so because he wants us to have interior peace. Nothing disturbs our minds more than the thirst for recognition and esteem. When we are always comparing ourselves to others, we are filled with worries, envy, stress, anger, and uncertainty. But if we simply try to give our best in life for Christ, thinking more of the glory of God than of self, and recognizing the abundant generosity of God's love, then our trust in him will grow, those selfish motives will shrink, and we will begin to experience the unshakable peace and security that only Christ can give. Jesus is the very best teacher for us, because he always backs up his words with his example.

It is interesting to note that the very next passage in the Gospel of Matthew, the one right after this parable, is our Lord's third and final prediction of his coming passion. Jesus and his Apostles were going up to Jerusalem, and St Matthew tells us that while they were on their way, Jesus took the twelve aside and said to them: "Now we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man is about to be handed over to the chief priests and scribes." They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the pagans to be mocked and scourged and crucified; and on the third day he will rise again. "Jesus had just told them that "the last shall be first," and now he tells them that he is going to allow himself to be humiliated, tortured, and killed - that he will freely be taking the very last place. Notice how specific Jesus' prediction is. He points out that his persecutors will be both Jewish and Gentile and he details the different types of torture that will be used. He knew exactly what was going to happen to him, and yet, knowing it, he still walks right into it. Instead of honor, Jesus freely accepts scorn; instead of a reward, he freely accepts punishment; instead of praise, mockery. Those who are vain and envious and seek the first place all the time will end up in the last place; their lives will be flashy on the outside for a little while, and tragic on the inside forever, but those who humble themselves will be exalted. Jesus treads the path first, so his friends, his apostles, won't fear to follow.

Seeking God's glory above all is not something we can learn overnight. We have to pray for the Spirit to teach us the wisdom of God. After Prayer, and living a sacramental life, it takes a sincere and constant effort to keep our naturally selfish tendencies under control. One area where our selfishness is especially rambunctious is that of our speech, our words. The devil can make a lot of progress against us by encouraging us to speak badly of other people. All of us here are extra vulnerable to the temptation of self-

righteousness because we are working hard to live our faith... Yet, like the Pharisees, we can start thinking so highly of ourselves that we begin looking down on others. When we fall into that trap, it usually comes out in our speech: We criticize other people - not constructively, to their faces, but destructively, behind their backs; we spread news of their failings and sins (this is the sin of detraction); we pass on rumors that we don't know are true (this is gossip); and sometimes we even tell lies about them (this is slander). Whenever we do those things, it's because we want to appear superior in the eyes of the people we are speaking to. We think (wrongly) that lowering their opinion of someone else will elevate their opinion of us. Yet, how can that be pleasing to God? If we cared more about glorifying God than self, we would do just the opposite! Instead of cutting people down, we would build them up, speaking well of them - just as we would like them to do for us. Jesus knows all the dirt on us, and yet, he tells no one. This week, let us remember where you are in the long line of life isn't what God is concerned about for you. It's about the work we are doing here on earth for the glory of God. The last will be first, and the first will be last. Let us seek out the ways the church teaches us to live versus the way the world teaches us: let us seek the mind of Jesus and follow his example, so that we can begin to experience the interior peace that comes from seeking the glory of God more than the glory of self.