

Homily for  
September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018  
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Deacon Bill Pitocco

What is true success! What does it mean when people say she or he is a very successful Wife or Husband, Student, Doctor, Lawyer, athlete, musician .... What does that mean? Who determines what that success looks like? Is there something within all of our chosen paths, that is or always should be the defining factor of real success? Jesus has been teaching the world this lesson, by his example, since the day of his birth and in our gospel today he now teaches it with words.

When Jesus and his apostles sit down to relax in Capernaum after a day of walking the hot, dusty roads of Galilee, he knows exactly what they have been talking about - success, glory, greatness. But the apostles are too embarrassed to admit it; they suspect that their interest in worldly success is too self-centered to be praiseworthy. But our Lord's response is surprising. He doesn't tell them that they shouldn't desire to excel, to achieve, to do great things. He doesn't condemn that very normal impulse - because he knows that achieving things, making a difference in the world, is a basic need felt by every human heart. It's is one of the purposes of our lives: being a sign of God's goodness by making a positive difference in the world. So, Jesus doesn't scold them for wanting to do something great. Instead, he tells them what true

greatness really is. The great task for every Christian isn't to achieve fame and fortune, popularity, power, and worldly success. Rather, it's the same task that Christ himself undertook: to serve others, to reach out to those who are weak and in need.

We are all pilgrims on the same journey, here to help each other along the way and to be Christ to each other. That's why Jesus says in our gospel today "if anyone wishes to be first, he must be the servant of all". You see, greatness in God's Kingdom is equated with humility, an attitude of the heart that puts the good of others ahead of one's own preferences: it's self-giving, not self-getting. He doesn't say to his apostles, "Don't strive to achieve great things," but he does point out where true, lasting, fulfilling greatness lies - in loving one's neighbor as Christ has loved them.

St. James reminds us in today's Second Reading that jealousy and selfish ambition are the opposite of loving your neighbor: that those things only lead to greater discord in the world. He teaches us that outer conflicts stem from inner ones. That our selfish ambitions don't just remain in our hearts; they put us on a path to clashing with others pursuing their own selfish goals. Paths that only leads to frustration, because seeking vain things are seeking empty things, and if those things can never satisfy us, we will always be at conflict within ourselves and

with others. Jesus is the Servant-Lord; we, his faithful disciples, are called to follow in those demanding footsteps.

And there are those among us who do, no matter what the cost – Native Houstonian Kay Poe was expected to win the U.S. Taekwondo Olympic trials in the year 2000. But in her last match before the flyweight division championship fight, Poe took a blow to the knee that rendered her barely able to walk. It appeared her Olympic dreams would be dashed; she could not beat an opponent on only one leg. But what happened next is the stuff of true success. Poe's opponent was also her best friend and training partner, Esther Kim. Kim was a surprise contender for the championship, and she thought Poe would have won their match if not for her injury. But instead of taking advantage of the opportunity to make the final spot on the Olympic team, Kim forfeited the championship to her friend. "I wasn't throwing my dreams away," Kim told People magazine. "I was handing them to Kay." She later told stunned reporters, "There's more than one way to be a champion."

Most of us are able to see the beauty of this humility and humble service to others; we can understand intuitively why this is the mark of True Success. But putting this idea into practice is not so easy. We are willing to commit "random acts of kindness" now and then, because they make us feel good. But real progress towards spiritual maturity requires a deeper commitment. The best place to implement this plan for True

Success is at home. After all, home is meant to be our first “church” It is in our closest relationships, those of our family, that our natural selfishness tends to come out most easily. And so, to transform those tendencies, to purify them and grow in the virtue of humility, we need to attack them there. Humbly serving our spouse, our siblings, our parents - this is true Christ-like virtue, this is where we forge a Christ-like heart. Our family members know us well; they are familiar with our tantrums and egocentric habits. As a result, they aren't usually impressed by an extra act of kindness, service, or self-control, by an extra effort to be patient or to hold our tongue. That's why the home is the best place to grow in humility and pursue True Success. Serving others when there is no reward or recognition involved is the best way to follow Christ's example and purify our hearts - after all, his service to others got him crucified. If we gradually learn to think about others before ourselves inside the four walls of our home, it will become second nature to do so outside those four walls. And when that happens, we will be on the fast track to true success.