

As Christians, as people of faith, we are all called to get closer to Jesus; to get to know Him better; to become more like Him. And for the most part I think we do respond to this call in our own ways. If that weren't the case, then I'd suspect that we wouldn't be here this morning.

We gather here today, and every Sunday, so that we can learn more about Christ and so that we can be closer to Him. In some very tangible way His presence here draws us. We listen to Him speak in the Gospel, we embrace Him in each other as we share His peace, and we become one with Him in a most intimate way when we receive His body and blood in Holy Communion. I'd suggest that we all desire to be as close to Jesus as we possibly can. And that is good.

In today's Gospel we hear the story of two brothers who also desire to be close to Jesus; James and John. They make the presumptuous request to be at his right and left side when he comes into glory. And it's interesting to see the reaction of the other disciples; they're indignant! How dare these two fishermen ask such a thing?

But if we think about it, isn't what James and John ask pretty much what all Christians, all people of faith want as well? What they ask is not necessarily an outrageous request. Through their deep faith in who Jesus is they realize that they never want to be separated from him. So, they ask to be close to him always. And isn't that really what we all want?

Jesus tells the brothers that in order for them to be close to him they must follow him completely; they must experience the baptism he experiences, they must drink the cup that he drinks. In other words, they must be willing to give their lives totally and completely to being servants to others, as Jesus has done. A difficult task, but a necessary one for all followers of Christ. To be truly close to Christ means to be willing to do as he has done; to experience his baptism to drink the cup he drinks.

This can mean many things to us. We've certainly experienced our own Baptism, most of us as infants. And we certainly drink the cup of Salvation in Holy Communion, but we know that Jesus is speaking metaphorically here.

His baptism by John was followed immediately by 40 days of fasting and temptation in the desert; a time of distress and testing. In our own lives I think we've all had desert experiences; times of distress in our lives, times when we've been pushed to the limits, times when we've been tested. In these times we are experiencing the baptism that Jesus experienced. These are times when our faith is tested; times when our faith can be strengthened if we can keep our focus on our deep desire to be close to Christ.

The cup from which Jesus drank is the cup of sorrow. In the garden on the night of his betrayal, Jesus prayed that the cup pass his lips. This is the cup of ultimate pain and death to self. Yet he accepted this cup for the sake of all; for you and for me so that our sins would be forgiven. This was the cup of ultimate sacrifice accepted with total self giving so that we might experience salvation.

How often have we accepted this cup; the cup of total giving of ourselves to others? We may never have the opportunity to make the ultimate sacrifice for others, though many have, but we do have opportunities every day to put the needs of others first. Parents do this all the time for their children. You, the people of Our Lady of Grace, do this through your generosity. Whenever there is a need, I am always amazed at the wonderful response from the parishioners. We have many opportunities to put the needs of others before our own. And in these instances we have the opportunity to drink the cup that Jesus drinks – even if we just take a small sip at times.

James and John ask for something that is presumptuous. At first glance, this may seem a selfish request. But another way to look at it is that they make a request that many of us may make; a request that stems from faith. To get what we ask for means that we need to examine our own willingness to follow Christ through the way we live our lives.

In a few minutes we will have the opportunity to receive Jesus in the form of bread and wine. This is an opportunity to be close to Jesus and to understand his desire to be close to us.