

## Place of honour ?

21 10 12

God, the giver of life,  
whose Holy Spirit wells up within your Church:  
by the Spirit's gifts equip us to live the gospel of Christ  
and make us eager to do your will,  
that we may share with the whole creation  
the joys of eternal life.

My text can be found in today's gospel from Mark chapter 10 and verse 38:

**'You do not know what you are asking for.'**

When you go somewhere, do you ever wonder where you should sit ? In church, you can sit almost anywhere though not many people choose to sit in the front row in case you get picked on by the preacher ! Of course, you can't have Father Peter's seat unless you want to take the service; and you can't sit in the choir stalls unless you want to sing with the choir. But if you went to the Olympic Stadium in the summer, would you have liked to have sat in the posh seats and have the best views and have people think you must be well rich and well important to be sitting where you were sat ? Well today's gospel is all about where the brothers James and John would like to sit.

It starts off with something that sounds quite dodgy – an open-ended request. James and John ask Jesus, **'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of**

you.’ They have not said what they want and if Jesus says yes, then he has no idea what he’d be agreeing to do – not good – it’s just like signing a blank cheque. Now Jesus is too shrewd to agree to do something without first knowing what that something is so he simply asks the brothers, ‘What is it you want me to do for you?’ And then they come out with it: ‘Grant us to sit, one on your right hand and one at your left in your glory.’

If you ever go to a formal dinner, then you’ll know that the most important seats are on the top table. And on the top table, the most important seat is in the middle. And the seats on either side of the one in the middle, on the left and on the right, would be occupied by the next two most important people there. So what James and John want Jesus to agree to is that they, James and John, will be the most important people when Jesus is universally recognised as the Messiah and is crowned as the new King of Israel.

Understandably, the other ten disciples are not pleased that James and John want to be better than them, more important than them in the Kingdom of God, but Jesus takes the opportunity to point out again to his disciples that true leadership lies in serving others rather than being served. To be a follower of Christ is all about service and as the Servant King, Jesus is the prime example of such service.

Well, I could stop there but if you’re still awake, you may have noticed that I’ve not yet looked at this morning’s text, ‘You do not know what you are asking for.’ But surely what they are asking for is obvious, isn’t it? Aren’t the brothers asking for the most important places when Jesus is enthroned as King of Israel? They

are but the places are not what the brothers think they are and nor does Jesus tell them except simply to say they really don't know what they are asking for. Jesus does tell them that they are not his to give, that they have already been allocated. But what Jesus does not say and what the brothers do not know is what those places actually are. They are the two crosses on the hill outside the gates of the Jerusalem, one on either side of the cross on which Jesus is to be crucified. Thankfully for James and John they don't get what they are asking for.

So this morning, perhaps an important lesson for us all to learn is that before we ask for anything, we should be sure of what exactly we are asking for. And the other most important lesson is that in Christian terms, being a leader is about serving rather than being served.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Parish Eucharist*

*St Mary the Virgin and All Saints, Potters Bar*

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H: Sermon 26 : Place of honour

