

Texts: Mark 9:30-37; James 3:61-4:3
Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B
23 September 2018
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This evening is a celebration, as Dulce Vermette makes her quinceañera vow to follow Jesus Christ and take the Blessed Virgin Mary as the model for her faith and life. But tonight also has a touch of sadness, as in tonight's Gospel we hear how Jesus puts his arms around a child and says, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me not me but the one who sent me." Sad and painful to hear, because now we know how many men - priests and bishops - *falsely* acting in Jesus' name did not welcome children but abused and exploited them. Jesus's words tonight remind us that those evil men, in abusing and exploiting children, also were abusing and exploiting Jesus and his Heavenly Father. These *supposed* men of the Church were *not* welcoming Jesus and his Heavenly Father, but were rejecting them as they harmed children.

So tonight - even in a celebration - we cannot forget those who were harmed. Because Jesus speaks of them we acknowledge them, pray for them and their families, and commit ourselves to work for their vindication and an eradication of this evil in the Church.

But that is not the *total* story of the Church. Tonight is a night that offers hope. Tonight is a night of celebration and *inspiration*, as we see Dulce Vermette committing herself to serve Jesus Christ in her life with Our Mother Mary as her example of service. We take hope and inspiration from Dulce's commitment as a sign that the Holy Spirit continues to be at work in the Church moving young women and men to follow Jesus, knowing that the vast majority of Christians *want* to faithfully serve the Lord Jesus by serving him in others.

And that is the reason Jesus took that child into his arms, as an example of how to serve. We can't forget that. The followers of Jesus were arguing among themselves about which one of them was the greatest! That's how it could be in the Church, even with Jesus standing right there! Of course, none of them would admit it when Jesus asked - but Jesus knew. And Jesus decided it was time to teach them what Christian greatness meant. That's why Jesus took one of the children there in the house and stood that child in front of his followers who were arguing about which

one of them was the greatest. In Jesus' day, the persons with the lowest status in a house, those with the lowest rank, were the children. So Jesus turns on their head those arguments his followers were having about greatness and points out, "If you want to be the first, you need to be the last. If you really want to be greatest, you have to be servant of all – you have to be a servant even of this child, who has the lowest status and rank. Because then you will really be serving me and my Father."

That must have sounded like a foreign language to them, because it was so different from how they saw their world operating. It still sounds like a foreign language to us today. It still seems strange to our world, and foolish, when Christians old and young commit ourselves to the service of others first, when young people take up the torch of Christian faith handed down to them by their parents and grandparents, when a young person makes the vow to follow Jesus in the Sacrament of Confirmation or when Dulce Vermette makes that vow and promise at her quinceañera tonight. Talk about counter-cultural! When the Church is at its best, listening to the Holy Spirit, we *are* counter-cultural!

St James says it best in the words we heard from his letter tonight:

Where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above - [the guiding wisdom of the Holy Spirit] - the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace.

Sisters and brothers, for the sake of Jesus and his good news of healing and salvation, for the sake of those we are told to make ourselves servants of, we Christians must stand up against the disorder and wickedness in our Church and in our world, and reap a harvest of righteousness for the world by cultivating the peace of Jesus. Dulce Vermette, if you are ready to take up that Christian commitment to be the servant of all, and to cultivate the peace of Jesus in our world, I invite you now to come forward and make your quinceañera vow.