

My Dear People of God,

As Christians, we are called to live in peace and harmony with one another. One of the things that is very damaging to unity is false ambition and a false image of ourselves. This causes us to put ourselves and our own interests above others and their interests.

There is an old Italian proverb that runs as follows: ***“After the game, the king and the pawn go into the same box.”*** This proverb comes from the board game called Chess. The modern rules of this game were developed in Italy. For those unfamiliar with the game of chess, each player has 16 pieces and there are six different pieces such as a king, a queen, castles, bishops etc. The most important or powerful piece is the king. When your opponent attacks your king and he cannot be rescued, you have lost the game. On the other hand, the least important is the pawn. If your opponent captures one of your pawns, it could hurt you, but it is usually not fatal. And here comes the message of that proverb: in spite of their roles and levels of importance, *after the game, the king and the pawn go into the same box!* In other words, no matter how important we are, how high or low of a position we hold in society, or how rich, smart ... we are, we are all the same in one respect; death will take all of us.

In the gospel reading, the disciples are caught in an argument and discussion about who of them is the greatest. I guess, since the message of Jesus was about a kingdom, they were fighting over who would occupy important places in that kingdom. Jesus' response to them was very gentle and invites them to a disposition of humility. He used a simple expression of affection for a child. Using a child as an example of humility, Jesus said; *‘if anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.’* Then Jesus went further and highlighted a child, the lowest and most vulnerable member of the human race. Jesus took a child, placed the child in their midst, and putting His arms around the child, Jesus said to the disciples; *“Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me.”*

You might wonder and ask; does Jesus imply that we are to think of ourselves as having no worth or importance? Or does Jesus not want us to be successful in life? Or does Jesus not want us to strive for high positions in our society? Not at all. On the contrary Jesus is in fact interested in our being great, but He wants us to be great in the right way. Jesus wants us not to be self-seeking but others seeking. Simply put, we should desire these positions as opportunities to serve others. He therefore teaches us that to be great is to serve others. To emphasize this point, He said; *“I am in your midst as one who serves.”* (Luke 22:26-27).

It is therefore not ambition itself that is condemned by Jesus, but false ambition. In fact, it is good to be ambitious, to have goals, to want to be good at what one does and to succeed in it. False ambition (which is condemned by Jesus) is selfish and involves a desire to rule others. It creates conflict and division and is very damaging to the unity of the community. True ambition, is the desire to serve others. The best and purest kind of service is that which is rendered to the little ones, that is the most vulnerable and insignificant in the community.

In the second reading, St James always being very practical points out that *'where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice'*. He goes on to state that; *'.. the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace'*

Dear brothers and sisters, as we continue on our journey of faith, let the ancient Italian proverb be a source of inspiration for us: ***'After the game, the king and the pawn go into the same box.'***

Thanks and God bless

*Fr Simon Peter*