

HOMILY
29th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
OCTOBER 16/17, 2021

There are a number of companies that are offering some rather unique benefits to attract or retain employees. One of the perks offered by Scripps Health, a California Health Care System, is pet insurance for their employees' pets. S.C. Johnson offers their employees concierge services that takes care of daily tasks such as picking up dry cleaning and making trips to the post office. Google offers their employees free food, massages, ping pong and video games at the office. The law firm, Freeborn and Peters, has an annual luggage party. On a certain day, they encourage people to come to work with a packed suitcase; and they send a number of lucky employees on an all-expenses paid holiday to Las Vegas right there and then.

I think that is what James and John were doing in the Gospel reading today. They were asking for some perks, places of honor in heaven, for knowing Jesus. Jesus tells them that they do not know what they are asking for. Can you do the suffering that is involved in being a disciple? You are going to have to suffer to get the perks. Just like the employees of the different firms have to do some suffering to get the perks. They have to show up every day and do a good job to keep their job and to get the perks. There is no perfect job is there? Every job involves doing some things you do not like and that involves a degree of suffering. If you love everything about an activity, we call these hobbies and you do not get paid to do them.

Jesus asks them: "Can you drink the cup that I drink?" He is referring to his suffering and death on the cross for our redemption. So let's talk a little about redemptive suffering. Redemption means ransom or exchange. For example, in the past, you could buy a person out of slavery by giving something of value or giving yourself for a period of time. Then you become that person's redeemer. You exchange yourself for that individual. Jesus is inviting us to be involved in his redemptive suffering in the world today. There are many examples of redemptive suffering. People in this country died in

wars so that we can have the freedoms that we enjoy in this country today. People have suffered and died from diseases; and from them, we have learned to treat the diseases. People have suffered seemingly senseless deaths, and we have learned how to build safer buildings and how to make cars and driving safer. Parents have endured great suffering and self denial to enable their children to grow and mature.

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ does not mean that if I do all of the right things and follow all of the rules, I will get what I want and have an easy life. Jesus does not promise that. But Jesus does promise to be with us always, to walk with us in the suffering and to love us unconditionally through it all. He will help us work through it. That is what this life is. We are not in heaven yet. There is suffering in this life. We may not like it, but that is what it is. We can run from the suffering, we can try to deny it, we can refuse to face it or we can make everybody miserable around us by complaining; or we can face it head on and make it redemptive suffering. Work through it with Jesus without passing on the suffering to the people around us. Something very good can come out of our suffering if we let it. We may not see the goodness at the time we are going through the suffering, we may never see it ourselves, but good things come from it. This life is not about being happy. There is a line from the old movie, "Lovers and Other Strangers." The Bea Arthur character looks at her son and says: "Don't look for happiness, Ritchie. It will only make you miserable." And I think there is some truth in this line. Happiness comes and goes based upon what is going on in our lives. Life in this world is about being whole and fulfilled and joyful. Living a life of discipleship is how you can find this. I think we should stop asking ourselves: "Am I happy?" Maybe a better question is: "Will the earth be a better place because I walked upon it?" President Calvin Coolidge once said: "No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor is the reward for what he gave."

Love & Peace,
Fr. Jim