

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

A priest went into a Washington, D. C. barber shop for a haircut. When the barber finished, the priest asked him what the charge was, and the barber responded, "No charge, Father, you are serving the Lord and I consider my service rendered to you as a service to the Lord." The next morning when the barber arrived at his shop, he found at his front door a stack of usable Christmas cards and a note of thanks from the priest. A few days later, a police officer went to the same barber for a haircut. When he went to pay, the barber said, "No charge, officer. I consider it a service to our community because you serve our community." The next morning when the barber arrived at his shop there were a dozen donuts at the front door and a note of thanks from the policeman. A few days after this an influential senator came in for a haircut. "No charge, Senator, I consider it a service to my country." The next morning when the barber arrived at his shop there were two congressmen waiting for their chance for the barber's free service, carrying a note of thanks from the Senator!

Dear Friends,

In today's world all the leaders want to be in power. They want to be noticed and recognized in one way or another. We all want to be noticed and get appreciated for small things we do. I even see people refer to Pope Francis as the Media Pope. We all have personal ambitions.

The readings today, especially the Gospel, talk about service with humility. Jesus showed the example of his service to us in a most humble way. The beautiful question Jesus asked them was, "What do you wish me to do for you?"

It is impossible to know from external appearances what kinds of interior burdens people carry with them throughout life. In fact, if we knew the inside story of most people's lives, we would gain a deep reverence for them, and a respect for their perseverance through the difficulties that only they have experienced and that only they know.

One such example is of the famous German Renaissance artist, Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) and his younger brother Albert, whose inner burdens were hidden to all but a few during their lifetimes. It is a story of how one person's suffering can transform another and even have an extraordinary effect on the world.

Albrecht and his brother Albert came from a middle-class family of eighteen children. Both boys wanted to be artists, but their parents could not afford to send the pair of them to the academy (art school) as they desired. In fact, it was unlikely that they could even afford to send one of the boys to a school of that type.

One night the two brothers made a pact. They would toss a coin, and the loser of the coin toss would go to work in the coal mines near their home, in order to support his brother during his years of study. Four years after that, they would reverse roles: the brother who went to school would then be able to work and make money and would support the other brother as the latter studied and pursued his dreams of becoming an artist.

As providence would have it, Albrecht won the coin toss and spent four years in the academy learning and applying his trade. He proved to be something of a prodigy at drawing, painting, and woodcutting, even surpassing his teachers in artistic ability.

When four years passed and it came time to send Albrecht's younger brother to school, poor Albert broke down sobbing. He showed his brother his working hands that had been damaged during the previous four years.

He told Albrecht that every bone in his hands had been broken at least once by the hard labor in the coal mines. His hands were rough, disfigured, and arthritic. It was now impossible for him to do the fine and delicate work of an artist.

It is said that Albrecht was so moved by his brother's sacrifice that he asked Albert to pose in prayer for him. He then drew the famous ink and pencil sketch of the "Praying Hands" as a model for an altarpiece he had been commissioned to create for a patron.

The simple drawing, which contains in itself the silent story of brotherly love, sacrifice, and generosity, has become a favorite of Christians for generations. It is still seen today hanging on the walls of many Christian homes as a reminder of our need to pray.

It is also a reminder that the greatest sacrifices are often the most hidden – and the most pleasing in the eyes of God. Albert's four years of sacrifice for his older brother had an enormous spiritual effect: he gave the world the gift of one of the greatest artists who ever lived.

Let us all be a good brother to our family and neighbors. Today I need to be a model of Christ on the cross. Let us humble like a slave as Jesus did. Greatness can be achieved through brotherly love and sacrifice.