

In their 1969 book subtitled: “*Why things always go wrong*,” authors Dr. Laurence J. Peter and Raymond Hull formulate a humorous ‘principal’ which they apply to human organizations in an attempt to answer “why things always go wrong.” For many of us who have held jobs in industry, we may have experienced Dr. Peter’s proposal - known more commonly as *The Peter Principal*; which states that “employees tend to rise to their level of incompetence.”

The Peter Principal is meant to be taken tongue-in-cheek. On its own, it can sound rather cynical. It can be listed right up there with Murphy’s Law - which states that “if anything can go wrong, it will;” and MacGillicuddy’s Corollary to Murphy’s Law - which adds “at the worst possible time.” To which can be added Johnson’s Corollary - which states: “and it will be all your fault.”

In today’s Gospel reading, we hear James and John asking Jesus to do “*whatever [they] ask of [Him]*.” Pretty gutsy, if you ask me. And Jesus asks them if they can share in His mission - to which they ... somewhat blindly ... agree. He then turns the table on them in a sense; granting them a share in His mission; but but denying their initial request to sit at His right and His left.

It would seem that it is human nature to think of ourselves as being under-paid, under-utilized, under-appreciated ... pretty much under everything. We are always reaching beyond ourselves, looking for the next opportunity. There is a certain drive within us to aspire to be better than we are and to improve things.

I would like to think that this aspiration to higher things has its origin in our desire for God. Ever since our First Parents were kicked out of the Garden of Eden; humanity has been trying to return. Whether it’s the Tower of Babel from the Book of Genesis ... or the Stairway to Heaven from Jimmy Page and Led Zeppelin; humanity has a way of setting goals, and then looking for ways to go beyond them.

Of course, ambition - which is simply the desire for personal achievement - has a dark side. Unchecked ambition can become avarice ... greed, cupidity, rapacity ... an overwhelming obsession for more things, more power, and more acclaim.

In our prayer life, our own prayers can often come off sounding like James and John. Too many times people become disappointed with God when they don’t receive “whatever they asked of Him.”

I would say that the Apostles James and John are batting 500 in today’s Gospel. They’ve got it 50-50 ... half right; and half wrong.

The right half they have is that they asked big. We miss the boat when we don’t include God in everything. After all, God does desire to be involved in all that we do. It certainly doesn’t hurt to ask for God’s blessing before anything we do. And instead of relegating God to desperate situations, recognizing His many interventions in our daily lives can lead us into a spirit of gratitude - fostering a stronger relationship between us and the Almighty.

Now that was the good news. The bad news is that James and John missed the boat when they hoped to one-up the other 10 disciples. In the verses following their exchange we hear that the remaining Apostles were “indignant at James and John” after hearing what they asked Jesus. I wonder how many of the Apostles were indignant that James and John had the audacity to ask for power and prestige from Jesus ... and how many of them were indignant that they didn’t think to ask Jesus first?

Nonetheless, you might be wondering - if we’re supposed to ask big in our prayers ... what did James and John do wrong? And the answer is in the rest of the readings.

The Lesson from Isaiah speaks of the Suffering Servant who gives his life as an offering for sin. The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of Christ’s sympathy for our weakness and God’s generosity in dispensing mercy and grace. And at the end of the Gospel, Jesus speaks first in a paradox - what sounds like a riddle of sorts:

*Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant;
whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all.*

But Jesus’ next words tie right back to the prophecy of Isaiah when He concludes:

*For the Son of Man did not come to be served
but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

The key is humility. Humility is recognizing who we are and where we belong before Almighty God.

In the face of His majesty and glory ... we are at a loss to claim anything.

And yet, God outdoes us in humility. Despite the original sin of Adam and Eve, God sends His Son for our salvation. No matter the punishment, Christ is “crushed” as he bears our guilt.

But unlike the bumper sticker that reads: “Jesus is coming - and boy is He mad!” ... we can approach God in “confidence” fully expecting grace and mercy. There is nothing wrong with our being unqualified to effect our own salvation. That is why we have a Savior ... that is why we need to “let go and let God.”

Jesus demonstrated humility in the Incarnation. He showed us humility even more in his Passion and Death. He continues to show us His infinite humility when He becomes present on this altar at this Mass ... and at every Mass ... on every Altar.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ - let us pray for a share of His humility. Let us ask to be transformed by God’s grace and God’s mercy - being open to the infinite graces we will receive in this Most Blessed Sacrament. May we, through Divine assistance, be transformed into the individuals God created us to be - the sons and daughters of God the Father ... ransomed by the Precious Blood of His Son Jesus Christ on the Cross ... and filled with the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit.