

In the Navy, rank can often become a preoccupation in the mind of Sailors. In Boot Camp, everyone is a Recruit. Only about eight people have any distinction – Recruit CO, XO, MA, Yeoman, and Squad Leaders. Once you're out of Boot Camp, none of those mean much of anything. Rank is awarded based on a variety of things. In initial training, you're an E-1, an E2, or an E3. Among those designations, people will consider time in service and time in rate. And all of these things are visible on your uniform. Stripes on your sleeve, chevrons, rating badge, unit badge. The longer you're in, the higher you ascend. Depending on your deployments and character of service you receive ribbons and medals. Looking at someone's uniform can tell you a lot about who they are and where they've been – at least in the Navy.

Only once in my entire career did I ever pull rank. One of my buddies had been busted down in rank (again), and he was given extra duty in the form of trash detail and other demeaning things. During his time of restriction, he had to be escorted to and from the work spaces.

One night, it was my turn to be his escort. And the work he was doing was very important and necessary in preparation to our mission and an upcoming deployment. I came in to where he was working and told him "15 minutes til the end of shift." And in a panic, he jumped up and said, "I have to empty the trash." I told him, "No, don't worry ... I'll do it." He started to argue with me ... he said it was part of his punishment, he was the lower ranking person.

So, I said – "I order you to do the work, and let me empty the trash." He looked at me like I had three heads, laughed and sat back down. And I went about emptying the trash in the spaces.

The last part of the Gospel today says, "The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

This is nonsense in the eyes of a world that says "Whoever is in charge gets to tell everybody else what to do." Or, "Whoever exalts himself will gain a following of adoring fans." And, "Whoever humbles himself is a failure."

But the success of the world is empty. Jesus speaks out against the scribes and Pharisees who mouthed the words of the Law of God, but lived under the rules of the world. They recited the Law in its entirety, but lived it falsely.

Without God in the equation, the Law only shows people that they cannot live the Law. With God in the equation, the Law frees people to become the children of God.

The Prophet Isaiah says "Come now, let us set things right" ... "If you are willing, and obey, you shall eat the good things of the land"

Israel's inheritance was the land; our inheritance is the Kingdom of God.

So, as we continue in Lent ... "let us set things right." Let us examine how we live our lives; and where we live by the rules of the world, let us repent; and through God's grace, embrace the Law of Christ – the mind of Christ – who emptied himself ... and in becoming a servant was glorified. Which is where our Lenten journey leads – through the cross to Easter glory.