

Would you mind if I begin with asking you a question? “Where are you sitting right now?” Is it the place where you usually sit when you come here?

Teachers will tell you that students like to take the same seats each time they come into class, and get upset if someone else sits at ‘their’ desk.

If there is no established order of things, kids will often fight about who gets to sit in the front seat of the car, or on the sofa instead of a chair.

And it is not only kids who are concerned about seating arrangements. We adults care about where we sit at a concert, a play, or a game. It’s an honour to be seated at the head table at a wedding or a banquet. We probably wouldn’t think of describing ourselves in this way, but we are people who care about where we sit, - even in church.

In today’s Gospel James and John ask for seats at the right and left hand of Jesus in his glory. When the Kingdom comes they don’t want to miss out on any of the perks. They are looking for the best seats in heaven.

But Jesus tells them gently but firmly that sharing in his mission is much more demanding than buying a ticket or getting a reserved seat at the table. Think, for example, of the festivities that usually follow a wedding ceremony. Those at the head table are not those who promise to share the life of the newly-weds at some indefinite point in the future, but those who have already shared their lives and struggles, their sorrows and their joys.

It would be a poor friend who entered a relationship with the aim of getting a good seat at the wedding. And that is what Jesus says to James and John. We are to fix our eyes on building the Kingdom, in order to bring it about, - with courage, compassion, faithfulness and love, - not to gain a good seat when the Kingdom comes.

When shortly afterwards all the disciples are gathered, Jesus repeats the theme of true discipleship. Turning conventional wisdom on its head, Jesus declares that it is only in service that one becomes great. He tells

them simply and clearly that anyone who serves the rest is on the way to greatness, and the more servant-like the service, the greater the stature of the disciple. It’s the model Jesus showed them at the Last Supper, when he washed their feet. “For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

In one sense today’s Gospel is not about sitting at all; it is about standing. Jesus tells James and John, or tries to explain to them, that it is not where they sit that counts, but how, for what, and with whom they stand.

Think about last week, and some of the many places where you stood: in a check-out line, at the front of the class, over a hot stove, conducting a meeting, contemplating the stars, or at your front door responding to an unexpected knock. How did you stand there? Did you stand there as Jesus might have, expectantly and open? Or did you stand as James and John, looking for something else, awaiting someone different?

This week, as we remember World Mission Day, give a thought to where you stand in relation to the mission of the Church, to bring the Gospel to all nations, - remembering that this is not just a question of preaching the Good News, but also of being Good News, by the way we make it real through our caring, ministering to people’s needs, especially where they are disadvantaged by modern developments, such as is experienced in most of the 47 countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

One aspect of fulfilling this Mission at the local level is the work of our RCIA team, who accompany the candidates to learn more about our Catholic Faith, and help them to develop a real relationship with God, especially through the Gospel reflections and discussions and learning about Jesus. Two weeks ago that team began their work in earnest, when they met with three candidates to begin their Journey to Easter, if God wills it so.

They are with us here this evening, together with the team and their sponsors, so following this introduction I will call them forward for an official ceremony of commissioning for the sponsors and then the Rite of Welcome for our Candidates. I ask you for your support.