

Homily for Cap Corps Welcome and Commissioning Mass
St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Milwaukee
August 13, 2010
Jeremiah 1:5-9; Mark 10:35-45

A Redefining Moment

This past Tuesday, the Church celebrated the feast of St. Lawrence, a deacon who served in Rome under Pope Sixtus II during the persecutions of the Roman emperor Valerian in 258. Along with his fellow deacons, Lawrence was appointed to provide help for the poor and needy of the city. When his mentor and bishop Sixtus was summarily executed by imperial troops and his own martyrdom was imminent, Lawrence took all the money with which he had been entrusted and gave it to the poor. He also sold the liturgical vessels he had on hand and did the same.

It was rumored among the Roman authorities that the Church had hidden stores of great wealth. The Prefect of Rome therefore ordered Lawrence to appear before him with the Church's treasure. Lawrence requested and was given three days to gather it up. At the end of that time, he appeared before the Prefect and with him were all the poor and sick people of Rome who had been supported by the Church. Gesturing toward them, Lawrence told the Prefect, "Here is the Church's treasure!"

Just as St. Lawrence redefined the wealth of a Church in a time of persecution, so Jeremiah redefined wisdom and qualification and Jesus redefined greatness. Jeremiah was called by God to be a prophet at age 22. He was born of a priestly family in a village not far from Jerusalem at a time when his nation, the kingdom of Judah, was in a spiritual and moral crisis. In an era and culture in which wisdom was considered to be a natural and necessary byproduct of aging, Jeremiah initially responded to God's call with protest: "Lord, I don't know how to speak! I'm too young!"

God then reassured Jeremiah with a word and a gesture. The word is something that I hope you will remember this year, especially when you face times of trial and uncertainty: "I am with you to deliver you." Just as God touched the mouth of Jeremiah and placed his words in the prophet's mouth, God can also do the same for you. There will be times when you may feel inadequate to a situation or too young or new to contribute. Don't be afraid! The most valuable thing that you can share is your own experience—sometimes it takes a new set of eyes and ears to better understand a situation and find new and creative ways to address it.

At the same time, please remember that you're *not* "all that!" At a time when our media and technology often conspire to make a mountain of celebrity out of a molehill of talent or real significance—Is anybody as sick of hearing about Bristol Palin and Levi Johnston as I am?—the message that Jesus gives his disciples about real greatness is not merely countercultural but revolutionary!

In Matthew's gospel, when James and John asked Jesus to sit at his side when he would come in his glory, it was right after Jesus had made the third prediction of his passion, death and resurrection. His first announcement was met with (Peter's) denial (see Matthew 16:21-23); and his second was greeted with grief (see Matthew 17:22-23).

By the time of his third announcement, the disciples had come to accept what was going to happen, even if they didn't completely understand it. So James and John began to position themselves for what would come next. Matthew records that the other disciples "became indignant at James and John." Perhaps they thought that their fellow disciples were being arrogant or presumptuous; or maybe they just resented the fact that James and John beat them to the punch!

Jesus didn't try to change their aspirations but rather their motivation and understanding. *We should* strive for greatness and excellence, he assured them, but we also need to understand what true greatness really is. Greatness, he cautioned, is defined not by status but by service. It is measured not by how much power we have over others but by how well we empower them and help them realize their own God-given power within.

I pray that this will be a year in which you are able to redefine a few things. Without knowing it, you are already doing this service for us. Your year as a member of Cap Corps and in coming years as alumni will challenge us as Capuchins to continue to broaden our working definitions of partnership and membership. As you enter into your communities and ministries, you will also be redefining what most people think of internships.

You will learn, if you haven't already, that your year as a Cap Corps volunteer is not merely instrumental—a form of cheap labor or something to do until the economy improves and you can get a "real job." Nor is it just educational—a chance to live somewhere new or do something different. It is also meant to be *formational*: a chance for you to be transformed, and a chance for you to help us as a Province continue in our own ongoing renewal and transformation.

As you begin your year-long journey of service in Cap Corps, I invite you to join Jeremiah, Jesus, and St. Lawrence in this work of *holy redefinition*. God bless you. +