

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place a bible, lighted candle, and cup of wine or catawba juice at the center of your group.

LEADER: Creator and giver of all life, you became one of us in Jesus to show us who we can be.

ALL: Help us live the faith we profess.

LEADER: Let us approach God's throne of grace with confidence—to receive mercy and favor, to find help in time of need.

ALL: Help us live the faith we profess.



“We can,” James and John brashly pledge when Jesus asks if they can drink the cup he will drink in Sunday’s gospel. The pledge in Latin, *possumus*, is the motto of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

Many people said “we can” in the Civil Rights Movement. One of our sisters, Barbara Moore, said an unhesitating yes when her provincial leader asked her to join the delegation from Kansas City to march for voting rights in Selma, Alabama, in March 1965.

State troopers and police had stopped a march the previous Sunday with clubs, tear gas, water hoses, and fierce dogs. Church leaders around the country mobilized delegations to march again. The photo of clergy and sisters marching has become iconic. The two sisters with white guimpes are Sisters of St. Joseph.

Third from the left, next to one of our sisters, is Sister Antone Ebo, a Franciscan Sister of Mary, revered for her response to a reporter asking why she was marching. “I’m here because I’m a Negro, a nun, a Catholic, and because I want to bear witness,” she said. Her witness is part of the Catholic Church turning with the Second Vatican Council to the mission of transforming the life of the poor and afflicted on earth.

A nurse, administrator, chaplain, spiritual director, and pastoral associate over her 71 years as a Franciscan Sister of Mary, Sister Antone was the first African American woman to administer a hospital in the United States—St. Clare Hospital, Baraboo, Wisconsin. She died in 2017 at age 93.

At her funeral speakers recalled her counsel. “Continue

to do more, to follow the Lord’s admonition to love one another, to remain in his love, to answer when we are called to speak up and speak out.”

“I believe in the dignity and equality of every person and that no person should be denied voting rights,” Sister Barbara says. “In the van ride from Montgomery to Selma I began to realize the danger of the situation. Caucasians were visible along the route in pickup trucks and on their porches with shotguns visible.”

The crowds, the singing, arms locked in solidarity, and the commitment not to retaliate left an indelible impression on Sister Barbara. She has returned to Selma often to renew her yes.

● What do you regularly do to support human equality?

GOSPEL



Being great means serving all.

NARRATOR: James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus.

JAMES: Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.

JESUS: What is it?

JOHN: When you sit on your throne in your glorious kingdom, we want you to let us sit with you, one at your right and one at your left.

JESUS: You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?

JAMES AND JOHN: We can.

JESUS: The cup I will drink you will drink. The baptism with which I am baptized you will be baptized. But to sit at my right hand or my left is not for me to

give; it is for those for whom it has been prepared.

NARRATOR: When the other ten disciples heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. Sensing this, Jesus called them together.

JESUS: You know that those who have authority among the Gentiles lord it over their people. Their great ones are tyrants over them. It cannot be this way among you. Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be the slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Mark 10.35-45

Perhaps they will receive medals for their chests and plaques for their walls. Status in Jesus' glorious messianic kingdom commands their minds and impels their loyalty.

They imagine sharing a cup of victory, not of suffering. But Jesus is not the messiah that James, John, and the people of Israel expect. The brothers are right about themselves, however. They can and do keep the commitment they brashly make, but only after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, which transforms their vision and empowers their commitment.

● What are your spiritual ambitions?

● To what have you said a brash yes and only later discovered it demanded more than you anticipated?

James and John commit to discipleship.

Three times Jesus tells those who are journeying with him to Jerusalem that he will suffer, die, and rise after three days. Each prediction widens the irony between hearers of the gospels like us, who know how Jesus' story turns out, and disciples within the narrative like James and John, who don't have a clue who Jesus really is and what following Jesus will demand of them. In Mark's gospel, Jesus' inner circle of disciples—Peter, James, and John—seem as unenlightened about the meaning of discipleship as any people in

the crowds who see Jesus for the first time.

Despite Jesus forewarning James and John to the costs of discipleship, they have their own image of who he is fixed in their minds. The two brothers can imagine only the glory of following the messiah—the victories, the status, the revival of the nation. What they ask for are the top positions in Jesus' kingdom at his right hand and left hand.

Their request would raise them above the other disciples in status. Perhaps they will be ordering business cards with raised, embossed lettering.

The irony of James and John saying, "We can," is obvious in Mark's gospel. They do the opposite. They forsake Jesus when he gets arrested and flee with all of Jesus' men disciples except Peter. Peter follows until he denies that he even knows Jesus in the high priest's courtyard.

When following becomes life-threatening, neither James and John nor the others who are indignant at their ambition stay the course. Their commitment evaporates. They shrink from drinking the cup Jesus is about to drink. Mark wants us to recognize that Jesus' first disciples grow into their commitment as we can.

At every eucharist we drink the cup that Jesus drank. We

brashly say amen, this is the lifeblood of Christ poured out for us. It becomes part of us, a commitment to live into each day.

● **To what do you commit when at Mass you drink the cup that Jesus drank?**

In Sunday's gospel Jesus calls his disciples together when he hears the rest complaining about James and John seeking status. He defines himself as one who serves, who gives his life to redeem all. Jesus challenges his disciples to see they are following a servant, who wants to gather a community of equals for whom serving the rest is the most important activity. Jesus' instruction to his disciples continues to challenge us to service rather than status.

Jesus does not claim the power to name those on his right and left. He is the servant of the Father. Perhaps there are no special places in God's kin*dom and at God's banquet table.

Those who wish to act special and try to lord or lady it over others have missed the point of discipleship. The great ones serve others and have little concern for their status as great or special. In a community of



The 50th anniversary crossing

equals, the Christian ideal, all are mutually servants of one another.

● **Whose lives challenge you to live gospel values rather than work for social status?**

With voting rights in jeopardy, Sister Barbara looked forward to going to Selma for the 50th Anniversary. "Attempts to negate the gains of the Voting Rights Act fueled the importance of reminding the nation that we continue to struggle for justice and peace for all," she says.

"I was heartened to see so many families with small children, babies in arms and strollers, persons in

wheelchairs—all ages, all races, and ethnicities. The energy was electric.

"Local dignitaries spoke as well as Congressman John Lewis, one of my heroes. Sunday afternoon was the annual ritual of the walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. People carried the banners of their groups; several had on 'Selma' tee shirts; youth in African garb drummed and danced. I had a burst of energy as I finally set foot on the bridge and made it across once again.

"In 1965 people of good will responded not because of a political party or persuasion but because of their beliefs and a higher calling to recognize the dignity of all persons. Their actions make a plea for WEness."

- **What is the value of the ritual crossing of the bridge each year?**
- **How has its meaning changed over the years?**
- **What can we do to insure the human dignity of all?**

DO SOMETHING

CHARITY **JUSTICE**

- **Prepare to vote on Election Tuesday November 5. Learn about local and national candidates for political office. Weigh the issues they address in their campaigns. Get out and vote.**

Israel's suffering will justify many.

As Sunday's first reading, the Church reads two verses from Second Isaiah's songs about the exiled people of Israel as God's suffering servant. The Church reads the whole of this fourth servant song on Good Friday. The prophet trusts God has purpose for Israel's suffering captivity in Babylon; indeed, the people's afflictions will have the power to make others whole.

Most privileged Christians will hear the servant imagery in Sunday's first reading as familiar and pious. What do people hear who work as domestic servants? What do the order-taking service workers who keep our hotels clean hear? What do victims of torture hear in this imagery? Servant imagery must not rationalize the abuse of power.

Nonviolent protest proved one way to make a more perfect union in America that respected the human dignity and equality of African Americans. Marchers suffered violence from spitting to beating to shooting but did

nothing to escalate the violence. Instead the marches gathered together people who turned the violence into power for good.

The mystery of suffering has concerned humankind throughout its history. The question why rings out poignantly, especially in the suffering of innocent people, of children, of crack-addicted babies. Is there any value at all to such suffering? The servant songs claim there is, but it will only be known in "the fullness of days."

Israel is God's servant.

If my servants give their lives as an offering for sin, they shall see their descendants in a long life, and the will of God shall be accomplished in them. Out of their anguish they will see light in fullness of days. Through their suffering my servants shall justify many, and bear their guilt.

Isaiah 53.10-11

- What wisdom do you bring to the mystery of suffering?
- What power do you see or have you experienced in nonviolence?

PRAY

Pray together to conclude your reflection. Make a commitment to one way to live Jesus' word this week.

LEADER: Jesus, loving and patient teacher of your disciples, we have reflected on the cup you drank in pouring out your lifeblood, the cup you ask James and John to drink.

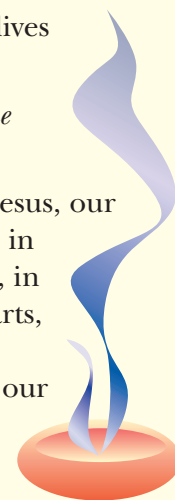
ALL: The cup that calls us to continue your service.

LEADER: Let us share aloud the ways we commit to discipleship and share the cup as we share our lives and commitments.

Pass the cup around the group.

LEADER: Be with us, Jesus, our teacher and brother, in the days of this week, in the hopes of our hearts, and in the service of those you bring into our lives each day.

ALL: May we grow into the mystery of your cross and resurrection as it unfolds in our lives.

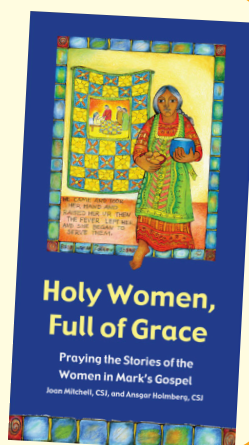


Holy Women, Full of Grace

Sister Joan's new book brings the women of Mark's gospel into your reflection and prayer. The litany format lets you pray it alone or reflect with a group. Art by Ansgar Holmberg, CSJ. 32 pages

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Joan Mitchell, CSJ, editor of Sunday by Sunday, holds a Masters in Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School and a Ph.D. in New Testament from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN.

Barbara Moore, CSJ, worked as a nurse at St. Joseph Hospital, then taught nursing and chaired the department at Avila University in Kansas City, Missouri. She directed community clinics and a bi-state federal program with ten sites in two states before serving in congregational leadership. She is a board member of Ascension Health.