

Welcome, everyone, as we continue to celebrate the Easter season and Christ's resurrection. I especially want to welcome any visitors we have with us here today, those who are here for the first time, and those who are here for the first time in a long time. We're not really concerned about what path you've walked that has brought you here today; we simply rejoice that we are here together, to worship God as one people. Please know that you belong here, and are always welcome.

Last week, I mentioned in my homily how following Jesus has an effect on our life, and I want to develop that a little bit more. Throughout Jesus' ministry, he invited his listeners to follow him, and when they did, their lives changed. It wasn't just a box that they checked, "follower of Jesus," and back to their old life. It was a new way of living, a better, more fulfilling way of living. As difficult as it may have been to make changes to their lives, being faithful to live the life that Christ was calling them to live resulted in a better life.

This decision isn't a one-time event. It is ongoing, life-long. Every morning, we wake up and have to decide again whether or not we will follow Jesus. And when we decide that we will, we then reflect on how that affects our day. It informs the way we spend our time, the choices that we make, the way we relate to others.

One important way our decision to follow Jesus changes our lives is in our service. As disciples of Christ, we serve. To say, "I follow Christ, but I am here to be

served, not to serve,” is wrong. I would even say it is anti-Christian. If we feel resentment and irritation whenever we are called upon to serve another person, to put their needs in front of ours, then we are in need of conversion. Christ tells us: “I have not come to be served, but to serve,” and “where I am, there is where my disciples will be.” We want to be like Jesus, and Jesus came to serve, and so we strive to develop a life of service, as well.

This is demonstrated in the life of Jesus and in the life of the early church. We heard in our first reading how the apostles did many signs and wonders for the people, who brought the sick and the possessed so that they could be cured. People came from other towns, even, so that there would have been long days of ministry to those who needed mercy. And they cured them all. It makes sense, because that is what Jesus did: as the Father has sent me, so I send you, he says in our gospel. Service to others is an indispensable mark of a disciple – a disciple is one who serves.

When we think of service, we may think of extraordinary acts that we can do – caring for strangers and going out of our way to serve the poor. That is certainly part of our service as disciples, but that’s not where service begins. Service begins in the home, with our daily, ordinary acts of service, depending on our vocation and our state of life. The most important service we do is our service in our

families: our spouse, our children, our parents, our elderly relatives. If someone were a super volunteer in the parish or the community, but neglected their spouse or their family, I would tell them to take a step back and reprioritize. Or as a pastor, if I'm helping with other penance services and retreats and seminars while neglecting my own parish, I would need to step back and reprioritize. There is service that only we can do because of our particular vocation – there is only one wife and mother, only one husband and father, only one pastor - and so that service must be the first that gets our attention.

There are seasons in our life when that service is so intense that it is the only service we can do – if you are in such a season, then that's all you *should* do. You might have your hands full with a newborn, or are the primary caregiver of an elderly parent, or be in whatever other situation where your family needs your full attention, and have very little left where you could serve outside of your vocation. Don't feel guilty if you have to say "no" to some good opportunities to serve in order to say "yes" to what's most important. Your vocation is your primary area of service.

Hopefully, there can be some balance and our vocation doesn't fill our entire lives. Frankly, that would be a difficult life to live. We are a part of a larger family, too, and we find fulfillment in being able to serve Christ not just in our immediate

families, but in the Body of Christ. And as disciples of Christ, we look for and are open to those opportunities to serve in a larger context. And this might be something that you would expect your pastor to say, but it's true and I want to stress that service in your parish is uniquely important in the life of a Catholic. It is in the parish that we experience Church, where we are nourished by the Word of God and by the Body of Christ. So we are not one charity among others, one opportunity to serve among many other opportunities. We are where the universal, Catholic Church is made manifest, where the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed in our local area.

So when we are in a season of life where we can serve outside of our particular vocation, we should first look to the parish. This weekend, we are having our Ministry Fair after all of the Masses. This is an opportunity to see the many ways you can serve, ask about time commitments and gifts needed, and hear some stories about how these ministries have touched people's lives, and how you could, too. I encourage you to stop by, grab some pizza and discern how you might be able to serve in your parish.

And finally, there is service outside of the parish. We are called to be the salt of the earth, the light for the nations, so our service out in the world is a part of our discipleship, as well. Whether that be in the context of our career, our recreation,

or the extraordinary service we have the opportunity to do, we are called to witness to non-believers through our service. No one person can do everything, but we are one body with many parts, and we can all do our part to preach the gospel to the world.

Being a disciple of Christ changes our lives. As disciples, part of that change is a call to serve. If this is an area in your life where you recognize a need to grow, I encourage you to take that step. Don't be afraid to use the gifts that God has given you for the service of others.