

**Wednesday of Holy Week – March 19, 2008 – Msgr. Kevin W. Irwin**

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I do not know when it started but it is a fixed custom by now. And this scene will occur with thousands of people today in restaurants in Washington, DC. Someone will seat the patrons and the next thing that will occur is the arrival of another person who will say:

“Hello, I’m Julie / James, and I’ll be your server tonight!”

The first time it happened to me I thought, “I don’t want a relationship, I just want a drink!”

I was immediately chided by my dinner companion who reminded me once again that I ought to temper my instinctive sardonic New York wit! That I should smile and get with the friendly program.

Server, servant...

Last Sunday, Monday, yesterday, today and on Good Friday the first readings of the liturgy are all from the “Servant Songs” of Isaiah. When read this week, this holiest of weeks, we immediately think of Jesus, and his sufferings and his service for us all through them – to redeem, sanctify and save us.

And yet these very same servant songs from Isaiah are read in the liturgy for the Birth of St. John the Baptist, at the vigil, the mass of the day and the Liturgy of the Hours from Evening Prayer I to II.

When we hear those texts on that feast we immediately reflect on how they provide us with John the Baptist’s job description, as the precursor of the Messiah, who died and rose so that we could be freed from our sins and live a holy life.

What a fascinating adventure, to try to find out who the **real** servant is in Isaiah.

The point to be made with these examples about Jesus and John the Baptist is that – simply put – we do not know who the ‘servant’ was in these texts from Isaiah. There is much rich speculation, but in the end we do not know.

In a “feigned intimacy, “my name is Julie / James and I’ll be your server”, *Entertainment Tonight*, *People* magazine, please notice me, *YouTube*, *MySpace*, personal blog” culture whose national anthem is “I did it my way!” that probably surprises us.

But I daresay the same thing should be true for anyone of us who seek to be ordained ministers of Jesus Christ. You see, if we are to take *in persona Christi capitis Ecclesiae* seriously then what we need to do is to imitate the servant of Isaiah. Such an imitation

places the emphasis on whom we witness to – Christ – and the myriad ways we can serve him in serving his people. It's not about me, MySpace or "my" tube!

As you well know one of the job descriptions of the pope is *servant of the servants of God* - then being a servant must and should be who we are. What matters is our service, not that we get credit for it.

What we do know about the servant in Isaiah's songs is that he suffers. The proclamation of these songs this week reminds us that we should expect that our service will bring us some measure of suffering...

Suffering when we speak the uncomfortable word, when being politically correct is the name of the game, especially in this city.

Suffering when we challenge prevailing assumptions about success in life, especially in a city where power ties mean not only cravats around the neck, but rather getting tied to and connected with the right people who can promote "number 1."

Suffering because we know that in the end what really matters is not what impression *we* make on others, especially in a city of first impressions and lasting judgments, but the deep and abiding impression Christ makes on us, on our souls, in baptism, at ordination and consequently in our behavior and in our spiritual lives.

Suffering in living the truth of the gospel in a world that all too often seeks compromise, the easy way out, or even worse a kind of religion that says it is civil when all it is is pseudo religion and show.

Suffering when we speak words that mirror the two edged sword of the scriptures, which penetrate and probe as well as console, when we can be tempted to imitate the Jack Lemmon of *Mass Appeal* who preferred the butter knife approach, to smooth and spread rather challenge than divide when necessary and required.

Suffering as we seek to be faithful to God and his church as believers, seminarians, the ordained – all of us consecrated -- when betrayal is all too possible and a temptation even among us. Sad to say Judas was not the last chosen one to betray the Master.

We come today as servants of the servant of Jesus Christ to hear the scriptures and be fed on the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation to become ever more faithful in what we say and do as ministers and servants of Christ. To receive from the dying and rising of Christ the courage and grace we need to deal with our sufferings, our imperfections and our sins. And to know that from this altar we share the Eucharist, so our sins may be forgiven.

Getting back to my restaurant story...in the end I suspect there are worse things than to be known to say "I'm Father Kevin, and I'm your servant for life."