

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Nov 12th 2013

Today's gospel can sound startling and uncomfortable to a rational, Western mind like mine. Jesus' story uses the social structure of his time to make a point. You wouldn't invite your servant to sit down at the table and serve you. His listeners understood – that would have been unthinkable.

Jesus says: "Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded?" That may make our modern ears uncomfortable because few of us have servants today and we can't comprehend a social structure that is so delineated.

But I think Jesus is really asking us today to have an attitude of service. Each of us can be "of service" in our lives. Service is an attitude and adopting that attitude at the start of every day can change our lives. That is not being subjected to an unhealthy domination by someone, but something different. The root of the word "obey" means to put the needs of another ahead of our own. What a difference we would see in our relationships and our lives if we continually put the needs of others head of our own. We would find ourselves less selfish and self-absorbed and more loving.

It is what parents do for their children and what spouses are called to do for each other in marriage. If I put the needs of my spouse ahead of my own, I am less likely to find fault and to grouse and grumble about my partner's faults. Instead I will have embraced the kind of humility that allows me to serve in the most real way.

Pope Francis recently exhorted two new Bishops to be "always in service" asking them to "Keep in mind that you were selected to serve, not to dominate." This is the message the Pope has been giving over and over – and it is the message of Jesus, the one who said, "The greatest among you must be your servant."

Maureen McCann Waldron