

A grocery store clerk was stocking produce when an elderly woman stopped him. "Pardon me, sir. I'd like to buy half a grapefruit." The clerk excused himself to ask the manager. He walked to the back room unaware that the woman had followed him. "Hey, Joe," he called out, "you won't believe this one. Some old bag out here wants to buy half a grapefruit." The manager stared behind the clerk, who turned and noticed the woman scowling there. The clerk turned back to the manager to say, "And this lovely lady wishes to buy the other half."

To serve the needs of all, you may need to be quick on your feet.

James and John are not too quick on their feet. The Gospel today pokes fun at both of them. Earlier on, Jesus told the apostles he was going to suffer and die for them. They couldn't deal with that, and talked instead about who among them would be the greatest. In today's story Jesus has just predicted his death for the third time. Now, imagine this, Jesus is like a terminally ill patient. He knows he's going to die; he wants to talk about it, but his friends and family can't do it. Death scares them, even if it's someone else's death. At this moment James and John come up and ask for places in the kingdom at the right and left of Jesus--it's a completely distasteful request at the most inappropriate moment.

Jesus says, "I won't talk about glory with you. I know you can stand glory. But what about suffering? Can you take suffering?" James and John figure if suffering is the road to glory they'll take it. Jesus says, "Great, because I can promise, you will suffer. Unfortunately, I cannot promise you glory."

This lesson, that suffering does not always lead to glory, is a bitter pill of life. But our actions don't always bring the reward they deserve. Jesus preaches a sermon on service to say that service is its own reward. If we wish to be great we cannot be important, we must be servants to all. The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve. That is the example we follow.

It's hard to serve. It's hard to serve when we're tired, when we feel we don't know how, or when people ask for half a grapefruit. But the Spirit will help us. The Spirit will fill us with love for others; the Spirit will give us wisdom to see that actions of service are actions with meaning. Even if it does not bring greatness, service will bring the greatest satisfaction of all.