

HOMILY

31st Sunday in OT/November 5, 2017

Naval serviceman, Jon Alden, reported for duty as a seaman. Six years later, he left as a chief. How did this young Sailor do so well so quickly? His CO, Commander David Forman identified one of the fundamentals is to LEAD, and LEAD WELL. Jon Alden became a Petty Officer because of his qualifications and hard work. But Commander Forman stresses this alone is not a sign of success. Once in a leadership position, Jon needed to invest his time in the personal success of the Sailors on his team; help them qualify, help them advance, and help them ensure their lives are in order so they are ready to go to sea.

Doing this also helped Jon in his own review because you are only as good as the people you lead. Under Jon's leadership, his team achieved 100% retention and 50% advancement, and two individuals received personal accommodations of achievement. Chief Petty Officer Jon Alden couldn't have risen in the ranks without helping his team rise also.

Zig Ziglar is known for many clever but meaningful quotes. One applies to this story well, "You can get everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want."

It sounds very self-serving. But isn't that just what Jon Alden did? Isn't that what we all want?

And what does "everything in life you want," mean? I believe, for all of us here, it means life in heaven for eternity.

In today's Gospel, we hear, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Someone who exalts himself, like the scribes and Pharisees in today's Gospel, look at building themselves up, by taking places of honor, or, by tearing others down, by pointing out their failings.

Do you know someone like that? Sadly, I do.

I've said, "Because I said so," more times than I care to admit. Yes, I've pointed out the mistakes of others. It's easy for me to say, "don't do that," then turn around and do it.

But I also struggle with looking inside; the wrong I have done and the right that I haven't done. Logically I know that focusing on my past mistakes doesn't change them, and worrying about making mistakes in the future won't prevent them. But I still do it. And I know that being in the moment, focusing on those around me, is the path God is leading me. But it is easier said than done.

Someone who humbles himself, as God encourages us to do, looks at building others up.

Jesus told the Pharisee, "The first law is 'Love the Lord you God...' And the second is like it, 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Love. There it is again. It's almost like God wants us to believe that love is the most important thing.

So, to be exalted, we must humble ourselves, love God and love others. These are the principles of servant leadership.

Robert Greenleaf was the founder of the modern Servant leadership movement. His life-long work revealed that a servant-leader intuitively wants to serve first and then aspires to lead. Someone who leads first doesn't know what his followers need.

I was fortunate to hear Fr. Jason last Sunday at the 8 AM Mass. He reminded us of our priorities; God first, then others and finally, ourselves.

So, how do we put others before ourselves? Let's look at some examples:

Saint Teresa of Calcutta answered God's call to serve the poorest of the poor. She founded the Missionaries of Charity whose focus was to help one person at a time. She knew no one person could help everyone. Her approach was systematic and effective. What began as a meager beginning of 12 now number over 4500 sisters in over 120 countries.

Saint Francis of Assisi was a caretaker of the poor. His lavish upbringing and encounters with the poor guided his personal mission to embrace poverty and care for those in need. Upon hearing Matthew's Gospel account of the "Commissioning of the Twelve," he devoted his life to a spirit of penance, brotherly love and peace. Within a year, he had 11 followers.

Today, it is said only God knows the total number worldwide.

Pope Francis is the head of state of Vatican City, is the bishop of the diocese of Rome, and leads an organization of over 1 billion people throughout the world. He is known for his humility as noted when he chose to live in the Vatican visitor's quarters rather than the lush papal apartments. He is loved within and outside the Catholic Church.

These three extraordinary people exemplify what God wants for us. All of us are called to greatness. And God has gifted each of us with the skills and support needed for greatness. We just need to embrace those gifts and answer His call.

We have many people here within our own parish who are amazing examples of servant-leaders; people who give their time, their money, their talents.

But what talents; what gifts? We are all blessed in many diverse ways. We only need to look around us to see – some of us work, some of us share, some of us inspire, some of us nurture. Whether we volunteer at the Mary Rose Mission, join organizations like the Knights of Columbus, St. Vincent de Paul or any other number of associations who need our help, join in a Parish ministry or visit with a sick or lonely friend, by looking toward our neighbor and outside ourselves, we are using God's gifts and doing God's will. What about God's support. In addition to the saints as examples, we have our parents, our teachers, our bishop and priests, and we have the Sacraments.

Baptism opens us to God's Grace and joins us with the Body of Christ. The Eucharist, the source and summit of Christian life, feeds, transforms and heals us on our spiritual journey. Reconciliation returns us to God's embrace. His Love is never-ending; we only need to turn back to Him.

We begin by looking to God, who provides all we need. We continue by looking outward toward our brothers and sisters, one at a time in their need. We take action doing what is needed.

And we seek God and return to Him when we fail (and we will fail).

So, how many people will we need to help so we can get to heaven? I don't know. But, I'm going to keep trying, keep helping others and keep seeking God's help until hopefully that day when I'm standing before the throne of God and hear those beautiful words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."