



September 23, 2012
Twenty-fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time

"Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, 'If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and servant of all.'"
Mark 9:35

Dear Friends;

Last week I was listening to National Public Radio's program *Talk of the Nation*. The host Neil Conan was interviewing Jeanne Marie Laskas who has written a book entitled, *Hidden America—From Coal Miners to Cowboys, an Examination of the Unseen People Who Make this Country Work*.

Five hundred feet underground Laskas asks a coal miner named Smitty, "Do you think it's weird that people know so little about you? The miner replied I don't think people know too much about the way the whole damn country works." In her book Jeanne Marie tries to show us some of the unseen little people who keep our lives running in ways of which we often never even think.

She spends time with coal miners, air traffic controllers, a female long-haul trucker, cowboys on a Texas beef ranch; she goes to the nation's largest landfill outside LA and more. One reviewer says that in her story telling Laskas "reminds us that it's not *what* makes our lives run smoothly but *who*, and at what cost." In the end she discovers in these people the hidden soul of the nation—the people on whom we depend the most but know the least. Many of these people do their jobs for little compensation. They mostly do it because they love it and find it important, meaningful and are contributing to a greater good.

It is just such people that Jesus is seeking in today's reading from the gospel of Mark. The reign of God proclaimed by Jesus is an inclusive movement. It reaches out most especially to the least to those who work unseen and tirelessly, often without thanks or recognition. The forgotten ones are the ones that Jesus is going after and gathers together.

The selection of the Twelve is a special sign of inclusion. By the time of Jesus in the first century, the ten northern tribes had basically disappeared. It was then said only the two southern tribes of Benjamin and Judah were all that mattered. Judah was the southern Kingdom that had managed to hang on under occupation. By selecting the Twelve Jesus is stating that he is here for everyone.

His proclamation of the Reign of God is a message of inclusion. God's reign rejects hierarchy and demands a radical equality. The argument among the Twelve about who is first means that they have completely missed the point. So to emphasize his point Jesus takes a child and holds the child up as symbol of how we should become to enter in to the new reality of the Kingdom.

Childhood in the ancient world was a time of terror. Infant mortality rates sometimes reached as high as 30 percent. And 60 per cent were dead by age sixteen. In Jesus' time children had no social status they were equal to a slave. It was only when children reached the age of maturity that the child became a free person with rights of inheritance. Children were used as information sources in the community. Children were loved by their families because they represented social security for their parents' old age.

For Jesus to tell the disciples to welcome children would have been a laugh to the rest of the culture. But like the hidden ones in Laskas' book Jesus is recognizing that even the least and lowest are of infinite importance. No one's role is any less important just because it is not flashy. We are all called to contribute to the life and the good of all. To receive the little ones is to receive the Kingdom of God!

Peace,

Fr. Ron