

January 20, 2022
Thursday of the 2nd Week
1 Sam 18:6-9; 19:1-7
Mk 3:7-12

Thanks be to God that my body was able to tolerate me playing basketball until I was 58 years old, because I love the game. I played on my first basketball team when I was 6, so I was privileged to play this great game for 52 years. Obviously by playing that long I played on many, many different teams.

When I was 16 years old, I played with the best player I ever had as a teammate. It was a summer league team in the City of Philadelphia. We had great expectations for our team, and most of the prognosticators were predicting us to win the championship of this rather prestigious league.

But we fell flat on our face. The problem was that our best player had his own way of measuring success. While 9 out of 10 of us measured success by the number of games won, our best player—I'll call him Jim—measured success by the number of points he scored. Jim wanted to score 25 points per game. He cared nothing about rebounding, playing defense, or even winning and losing. He just wanted to get his personal points. Once he got the ball, he would never pass it even if another player had a better shot. As the season wore on and our losses piled up the rest of us stopped passing the ball to Jim even when he was open. What a dysfunctional group we were, all because Jim was all about Jim.

We see this same me, myself, and I disease in today's reading from the First Book of Samuel. King Saul is angry and he's resentful and jealous of David even though David saved his bacon by killing Goliath, thereby

leading the Israelites to an existential victory over the Philistines. When the accolades of the people for David exceed those for Saul, Saul cannot bear it. He wants to kill David. One gets the sense that Saul would rather have been defeated by the Philistines than suffer the perceived indignation of his own people praising someone other than himself. It seems that Saul is interested only in himself.

We see the same thing in the gospel. Jesus withdraws to the wilderness because His growing popularity is such a threat to the Pharisees that they are conspiring with the courtiers of Herod Antipas to kill Him. Never mind that Jesus is delivering many people from their physical and spiritual afflictions.

We see this in all walks of life where individuals put themselves above the team, the community, the organization, or the country. It's all about me, not those I'm supposed

to serve. We even see it in our Church. It's a cancer and it always hurts people. My basketball team got clobbered. Saul ultimately committed suicide. Jesus got crucified.

As baptized Christians, we have each been anointed by God to be kings, servant kings like Jesus. I came not to be served, but to serve. It's our solemn responsibility, a responsibility we took on when we were baptized, either directly or through promises made on our behalf by our parents and godparents. Service is a beautiful ministry, but when our motivation to serve is to call attention to ourselves to enhance our own standing in the community, it is no longer service. It becomes the road to destruction, either to ourselves or others or both.

As we continue our celebration, let us pray for the gift of humility that we may be humble stewards of the Gospel so we can selflessly focus on the needs of others. May we always humbly accept invitations to serve while never pushing ourselves into positions of power for power's sake.