

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 22/23, 2018 – Reflection

'(Jesus asked His apostles)," What were you arguing about on the way?" But they remained silent. They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest.'

(The Gospel of Mark, Chapter 9)

The America of the 1950's was a very different place from the America of today. Ike was in the White House, the Greatest Generation back from war was raising families and working in industry. The country was focused on and fearful of the Red Threat, seeing commies hiding in every area of life, lurking behind practically every bush. One thing that was real was the Cold War and the nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union that threatened to blow up the world at any moment over even the smallest misstep or miscalculation.

But in America in the 1950's, there were deep chasms of division that had nothing to do with foreign threats. The fractured nation wasn't even 100 years removed from the scourge of slavery and the massive bloodshed of the Civil War. The Civil Rights movement hadn't yet found its full voice; schools, north and south were segregated, whether by law or by tacit practice. Water fountains, rest rooms, buses, restaurants, hotels were White Only or Colored Only, and God help the person who crossed that invisible divide - they could pay with their life!

My Dad, rest his soul, was coaching soccer in those years. He coached at his alma mater, Georgetown University in Washington D.C., a Catholic men's college run by the Jesuits. Washington in the 50's and the surrounding states of Virginia and Maryland were segregated places, still in many ways reflecting the attitudes and practices of antebellum Dixie. Even the university had in the previous century been involved in the owning and selling of slaves.

In 1957, my Dad was coaching in his last season. The team he had was game but just not too good. But the soccer team that year had white players and black players. As the season was winding down, two games remained on the schedule, both away, one with Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia and the last with the University of Maryland in College Park, Maryland. Distance meant that my Dad's team would have to bus to both locations and stay overnight in hotels or on-campus housing facilities. When my Dad learned in Virginia that the black players on the team would not be able to stay in the same hotel with the white players, he put his team back on their bus and refused to play the game. A week later, in Maryland, running up against the same situation, once again my Dad put his team, all of them, black and white, back on the bus and refused to play the game. Those two unplayed games were then, and remain to this day, the only two forfeits in Georgetown University Soccer history.

My Dad always wanted to be a great success in business, to make millions and millions of dollars. That never happened and I think my Dad felt sometimes like a disappointment, like he wasn't such a great person. What my Dad did in 1957 and in all the years after, without fanfare or notoriety, true to his principles and to his faith that all men are made equal by the Creator, was great; I think my Dad did a great

thing, stood for a great truth, showed great backbone and integrity, and followed in the footsteps of his Lord Jesus with great fearlessness and faithfulness. He didn't wear a Cardinal's red or a bishop's miter and certainly wore no angel's halo. People didn't stand when he entered a room as the band played Hail To The Chief! But I think my Dad, like so many other anonymous Christians, like so many other good but not famous Catholics, was great in the way Jesus calls us to be great: putting others first, giving children and young people example of right and justice and brotherhood, standing for the good when others would fall into line.

Jesus calls us to be great, not as the world judges greatness, but as the Cross shows what true greatness looks like: to give the last full measure in service, in love, in mercy, in faithfulness. This world may never notice or reward you for such greatness, but Jesus will see and know and say to you, His great friends, "This day you shall be with me in Paradise!"