

The understanding of greatness that weaves through every generation and culture is the central focus for Jesus as he responds to the request of James and John in our gospel lesson.

Kylian Mbappe is seen as great on the world stage today. Are you familiar with Kylian Mbappe. I did not recall him until I read an article about him in the latest copy of Time magazine. He is the young superstar that led France to its World Cup championship this summer. It was France's first World Cup crown since 1998, the year that Mbappe was born. He grew up in a poor suburb of Paris, the son of a father with Cameron ancestry and a mother with Algerian roots. He is the first teenager to score a goal in World Cup competition since the Brazilian soccer legend Pele.

Professionally, Mbappe now plays for a Paris soccer team. One year ago that Paris soccer team paid the team he was playing for in Monaco \$207 million so they could have him on their team. At age 18 Mbappe started receiving an annual salary of \$20 million. Mbappe is a national hero as he led France to its World Cup victory and he is the emerging star on the world soccer stage. One of the most known sports stars in the world today. Since I could not have told you who Kylian Mbappe was or what he did before I read the article it reminded me that my knowledge of sports' superstars is limited to the major sports in American headlines. Yet, what captured my attention in the article was related to Mbappe's demeanor. At age 19, as he thinks about the future he says, "I have learned that the biggest stars and the greatest players are the humble ones, the ones who respect people the most." Mbappe speaks with wisdom beyond his years. He says, "There are three criteria for success: respect, humility and lucidity."

Mbappe says he is heavily dependent on one thing to keep him grounded: his family; Mom, Dad, older and younger brother. Mbappe says, "We have always been very close. Very much a family, all together at home, all at the table eating together. We have never given up." He believes that cocoon has been crucial for his career. "They have always been there to help me, whether it was my first match as a kid or now in front of 80,000 spectators. That is real support. And it can be felt on the field."

Greatness is found in family closeness as well as maintaining the qualities of respect, humility and lucidity in our demeanor. I think I will tune in and watch some of that other game called football and cheer for Mbappe.

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Please hear this passage from the book entitled "United."

At first, I was disappointed. I had thought Frank, a tenant organizing legend in Newark, New Jersey, would ignite the crowd, lift the room, or fill us with hope. But then I realized: in this basement, in a room full of people enduring conditions that made their home a hostile place, he deferred to them. His focus was on *them*.

When Frank was done speaking, Ms. Jones (the Tenants Association President) opened the floor and people rose to speak. They asked questions, most of Ms. Jones, and she answered. Some expressed gratitude; some shared their grievances about what they were bearing and how it affected them, their jobs, their kids, their grandkids. There were complaints about the elevators that broke down with regularity, leaving the elderly and disabled stranded in the lobby and forcing so many to use the stairwells. And about how management didn't clean the common areas—most notably those stairwells. They were filthy, full of garbage, urine, feces, used drug paraphernalia. People spoke of how often the presence of a homeless or drug-addicted person sleeping in the stairwell made it more complicated to climb or descend the stairs. People talked about calling for help for those folk, and how nothing came of the call. It was clear that for many, merely venturing into the stairwells—was an act of courage.

People spoke of mice, rats, and roaches that plagued the buildings and the toll such infestations took on their physical and mental health. People spoke of the life disruptions that took place when heat and water failed. ... People spoke of the lack of security in the buildings, how vulnerable they were to vandalism, theft, and occasional physical confrontations. ...

I took notes and tried to record specific information that we could use later ... in detail to HUD (Housing and Urban Development). ... I was moved by the testimony, joined in the supportive responses, and felt increasingly motivated to be a part of this fight—but I must confess that as the meeting moved into its second hour, I began to lose patience if the folks digressed or repeated themselves. I had what I needed to confront HUD, and there seemed to be nothing new coming up. But people wanted to talk, so the meeting kept going. At times Ms. Jones and I would try to move the people along if they got carried away. I tried to do it without being rude, but Ms. Jones was more direct. We were good cop, bad cop, trying to keep the meeting moving.

Frank, on the other hand, possessed a bottomless reservoir of patience. I shot him an occasional glance, hoping for affirmation of my feelings, thinking I might get a look of sympathetic solidarity: *Yeah, I'm with you, this is going on too dang long*. Instead, what I got was a gentle smile: *Hey breathe, it's all right*. And then he would look at the next speaker, inviting him to take his time.

I realized that as he looked at each speaker, Frank *saw* that person. He connected to each of them with an expression of soulful kindness and an interest that seemed to emanate from the core of his being. ... I suddenly noticed a detail I had missed earlier in the meeting, a detail I would reflect on long after and still draw from today. In that meeting, Ms. Jones was the tenants' association president, the person of authority, and there were other association officers at the table too—people beloved and trusted in that community. Yet, most of the speakers, after briefly addressing Ms. Jones, looked squarely at Frank when they spoke. They hadn't been instructed to do so, and there was nothing in his initial words to command the attention people were giving him. But they did. I marveled at how this frumpy older man drew each speaker's eyes. What made it particularly impressive to me is that Frank's presence was humble; somehow, he made each speaker feel like he or she was the center of attention. Frank changed the temperature for the people in that room. In this dank basement, people turned toward him to feel his warmth, and they were made better by his energy. (pages 99-101, "United", Cory Booker)

Greatness is found in a humble spirit that provides dignity for others going through trying times. The understanding of greatness that weaves through every generation and culture is the central focus for Jesus as he responds to the request of James and John in our gospel lesson.

Jesus tells us that greatness is found in serving, being a servant. That is true, it can be great for those we serve and surprisingly it can be great for us as well.

Kathy Gottberg, whose writings can be found at SMART Living 365.com, shares insights from studies that reveal 7 big reasons why serving others actually serves us as well. They include more happiness, reduction of stress, relief from pain, longer lifespan, lower blood pressure, reduction in mild depression, and benefits for our careers. Let me reference happiness, blood pressure and reduction in mild depression.

More happiness. According to Stephen G. Post, professor of preventative medicine at Stony Brook University in New York City and author of *The Hidden Gifts of Helping*, a part of our brain lights up when we help others. That part of our brain then doles out feel-good chemicals like dopamine, and possibly serotonin. According to Post, "These chemicals help us feel joy and delight -- helper's high." A common reaction is that "some people feel more tranquil, peaceful, serene; others, warmer and more trusting." When we serve others we often give ourselves deeper purpose and meaning and that nearly always leads to greater happiness.

Lower blood pressure.

A study done by Psychology & Aging reports those adults over 50 who volunteered for 200 hours in the past year were 40 percent less likely to have hypertension than non-volunteers. It is believed this is accomplished because of lower stress and the effects of being active, social and altruistic.

Reduce mild depression.

A study of alcoholics going through AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) points out that those who volunteered to help others were twice as likely to stay clean a year later and their depression rates were correspondingly lower as well. Plus, in many cases mild depression is linked to isolation. Volunteering helps to keep us in regular contact with others and helps maintain a healthy social support system.

To see the benefits for stress, pain, longer life, and one's career please read *Kathy Gottberg's article on Volunteering at Huffington Post*.

Jesus notes that serving is important and is a key to greatness. Yet, how we serve is critical as well. Volunteering is truly beneficial to others and ourselves when we find our sweet spot in serving. Dr. Michael Poulin, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Buffalo in New York says, "Helping appears to only be good for you if you really care about those you're helping." In other words, feeling resentment or obligation will erase the benefits that we might otherwise receive in both our emotions and our physiology. If you feel exploited in any way, it is better not to take the action than stress yourself out doing something for the wrong reason.

In addition, as our gospel lesson indicates, serving isn't always fun -- there is usually time, energy and even money involved -- but it can be very meaningful and gratifying when we do that which matches our skill set and is in sync with the call of our heart.

Kylian Mbappe reminds us that greatness is found in family closeness as well as maintaining the qualities of respect, humility and lucidity. Frank, a tenant organizing legend in Newark, reminds us that greatness is found in a humble spirit that provides dignity for others going through trying times. Modern scientific studies reveal to us that serving is great for us as well as those we serve. The understanding of greatness that weaves through every generation and culture is the central focus for Jesus as he responds to the request of James and John in our gospel lesson. Greatness is found whenever we join together in service here at St. Paul. I guess it would be accurate to call our Mission Matters page in the bulletin the "Call to Greatness" page.