

Well two things that I love are history and movies and so one of my favorite movies is *We Were Soldiers*, a 2002 film starring Mel Gibson, which is based on a true story and recounts the first major American battle of the Vietnam War in the La Drang Valley in 1965. The movie is a powerful account of what our beloved servicemen in uniform experienced in the Vietnam War, a war in which my dad, God rest his soul, served honorably as a doctor in the medical corps of the 101st Airborne from 1971-1972. My family and I are so proud of him.

The main character in *We Were Soldiers* is Lt. Col. Hal Moore, played by Mel Gibson, who does a phenomenal job in the film. And one of the admirable qualities of Lt. Col. Hal Moore is his heroic and courageous leadership. Lt. Col. Moore is the commander of the 1st Battalion, 7 Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. And right before his battalion is deployed to Vietnam, Lt. Col. Moore, who was a faithful, devout Catholic, gives a powerful and stirring speech to his men, speaking to them passionately saying, "I can't promise you that I will bring you all home alive. ***But this I swear, before you and before Almighty God***, that when we go into battle, ***I will be the first*** to set foot

on the field and ***I will be the last*** to step off and ***I will leave no one behind. Dead or alive, we will all come home together***, so help me God.” In fact, a few times during the seemingly unwinnable battle, Lt. Col. Moore’s superiors are demanding that he leave the battlefield—Col. Moore repeatedly refuses saying that he will ***never*** leave his men.

Lt. Col. Hal Moore is a leader we all instinctively yearn for—someone who ***leads by example*** and ***does whatever they demand*** of their followers! A great leader understands that to ***“to lead, is to serve”***—and to serve means to give oneself ***completely to another*** without expecting anything in return! ***True service*** is devoid of self-interest. Moreover, a great leader is one who ***first does*** what they ***demand others*** to do. A great leader is willing to experience what their ***subordinates experience*** and they’re willing to get down in the trenches with them to share in their duties and suffering. This is servant-leadership at its best.

Brothers and sisters, as Catholics, we should strive to live the selfless model of virtuous, heroic servant-leadership that was perfectly embodied by our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord and Savior is the perfect servant-leader! And in today’s Liturgy of the Word, we see that at the

root of Christ's servant-leadership is His perfect love for the Father and for each and every human person.

We hear the Lord reassure us in the second reading today from the Letter to the Hebrews, that Jesus Christ, our eternal High Priest Who lovingly intercedes for us, is *truly one with us* in our humanity. The Lord reminds us: "For *we do not have a high priest* who is *unable to sympathize with our weaknesses*, but one who has similarly been tested in *every way, yet without sin*. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help."

If you noticed in the last month or so, we've been moving through the Gospel of Mark and we've been hearing about how childish and immature the Apostles have been, especially when it comes to how they initially viewed their role as disciples of Christ. In today's Gospel, we once again hear the Apostles James and John make selfish demands on Christ for their own personal glory. And how does the Son of God respond? He asks them a very powerful question: "Can you drink the cup that *I drink* or be baptized with the baptism with *which I am baptized*?" With these questions Jesus demonstrates that He will not ask

His Apostles to do anything that He *Himself will not do first!* He goes on to tell them: “Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come *to be served but to serve* and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Brothers and sisters, from time to time, we can be tempted to view God as some sort of distant, “out-of-touch” Being who doesn’t know us personally, who doesn’t care about us, who doesn’t understand what we’re going through and yet He seems to make all these harsh and challenging demands on us. As a result we can be tempted to become bitter towards God and act as if He doesn’t love us and that He has no clue what we’re going through or suffering. Yet, *in our Lord Jesus Christ*, the one true God, in a *very personal, intimate way*, entered into our own lives and truly became one of us, *most especially* in our suffering, our pain, our fear, our sorrow, and our temptations. And not only did Christ become one of us, but He also became *one with us in all things* but sin, because sin is so contrary to human nature as God intended it.

Brothers and sisters, God became *one of us* and *one with us*, precisely so that He could *lead us* through the darkness and suffering of this imperfect, earthly life. God became *one of us* and *one with us* *precisely* because *He came to serve us!* Just take a moment and consider this for a second: *God wants to serve you. And He wants to serve you by leading you.* God leads us through His Beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Christ is our Divine Servant-Leader who invites each of us by name to follow Him down a path that He *Himself has traveled first* for us! It is extremely important to remember that Christ does not demand *anything* of us that He Himself did *not already fulfill!*

Brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus is the perfect servant-leader Whom we can follow with the greatest confidence and certainty, knowing that if we give our lives completely to Him, He will *never* lead us astray! Rather, our Lord Jesus will *always* lead us to true life, true freedom, true happiness, and true peace. And if we truly follow Christ as one of His faithful disciples, then we should conform our entire life to

His and serve others as He serves us, with unconditional love, mercy, compassion, joy, and courage—expecting *absolutely nothing* in return.

You don't have to be the leader of a military unit to be a fruitful servant-leader after the Heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter if you're a mother or father, grandmother or grandfather, Godparent, aunt, uncle, friend, co-worker, classmate, etc. *All of us*, as disciples of Christ, are called to be humble and joyful servant-leaders who are prepared to give ourselves completely to others for *their* sake, not counting the cost, and expecting nothing in return.

As we worship and receive our Lord and Savior in the Most Holy Eucharist, let's ask the Lord for the grace to follow Him wherever that may lead. And let's also plead with Christ for the grace to lead and serve others in a totally selfless manner, always looking to Jesus as the perfect model Who teaches us by His own example.