Columns
Religious Life



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The reality of our changing society and the need for a cohesive coexistence with one another inform me of the critical need for leadership that unites, guides and enlivens its followers. Good leadership helps the group to keep the vision alive and work together to achieve it.

However, an ever-growing quest for power exhibited by many people desiring leadership roles in political and religious spheres seems to get in the way of God's will, which leadership should help prevail. I perceive a misconceived concept of leadership. Many people seem to view leadership as a place to show might, prestige and recognition rather than a place of service, even though leadership is temporary.

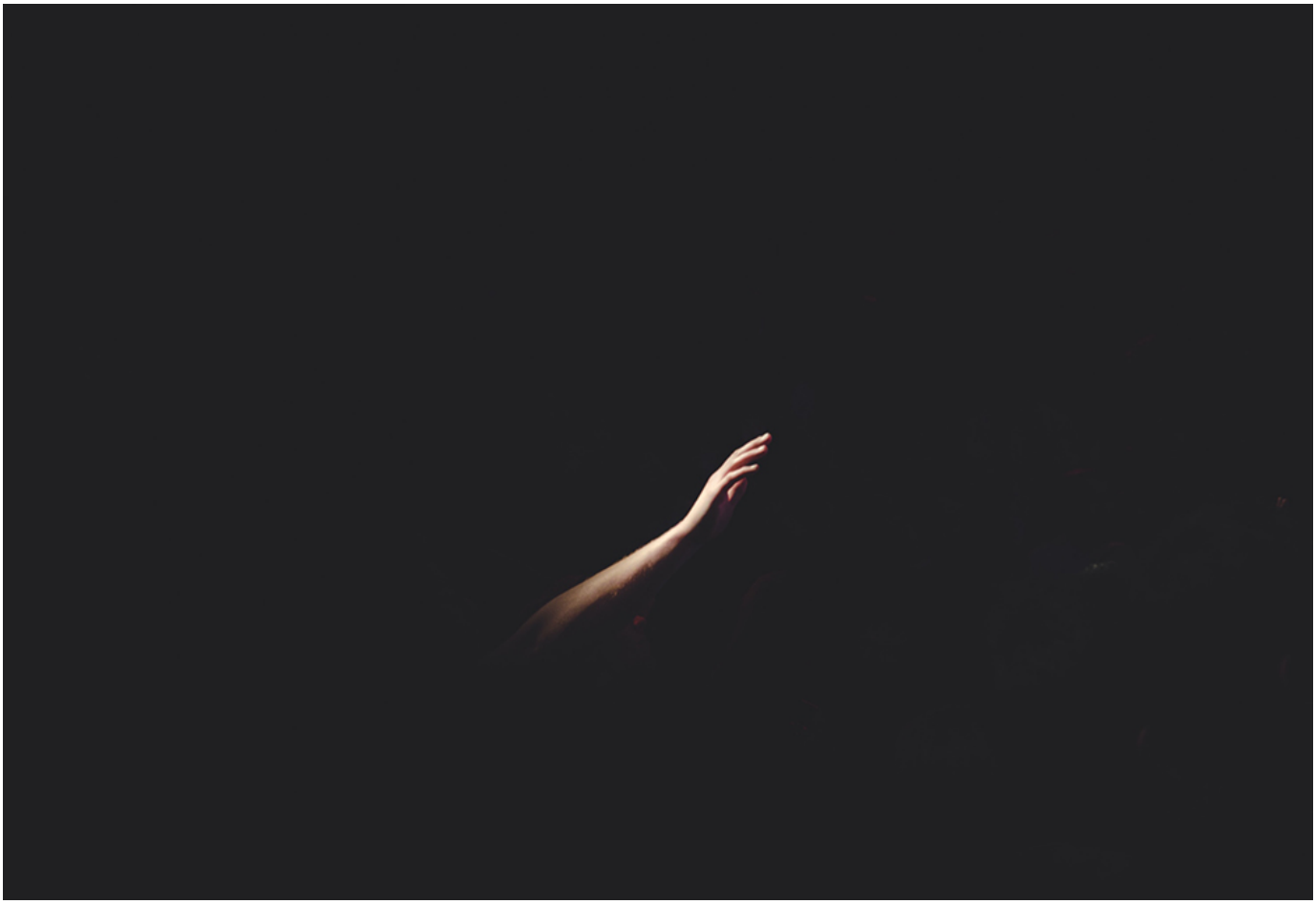
This reminds me of two women close to Jesus who asked for favors from him, namely the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Matthew 20:20-21) and Mary, the mother of Jesus (John 2:1-11). Informed by their requests for favor, a question comes to mind: When seeking leadership or presenting somebody for the same, what do I expect from it? What indications are there that it is for the common good?

When the mother of the sons of Zebedee asked for a favor, she did not see beyond her family and, therefore, asked for one of her sons to sit on the right and the other one on the left in his kingdom. This indicates that she was focused on what she could gain from her sons being given the positions she was pleading for them. In this regard, none of them responded appropriately when Jesus said he would be condemned to death. Instead of showing compassion for him, they were merely interested in what was in it for them with Jesus' departure.

The hunger for power robs one of compassion and quality of presence with others. It seems to breed a typical restlessness and false expectations of what one will become or what "my person" will do for me once in that position. Leadership, then, ceases to be an office and instead becomes a personal affair. There is constant competition, and members of the same group live as rivals, even though they have a common agenda, leading to the consequent failure to accomplish set goals. The focus is shifted from the mission to personalities.

For the sons of Zebedee, it was not about the mission at hand. Their expressed longing to be treated specially created discomfort among the group members. Is this not what is happening among many groups in the church, including religious communities? Sometimes, leadership roles are used as rewards for loyalty. However, in our religious context, we believe in the guidance of the Holy Spirit in appointing

leaders. This implies that human influence can undermine the work of the Holy Spirit, resulting in division within the group.



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The case was different with Mary, the mother of Jesus, who also sought favor from her son once at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. She anticipated the needs of a couple who were unaware that their wine had run out. In this case, she took the lead. Mary's actions spoke louder than her words. She did not intervene for her own sake. She demonstrated compassion by sparing them from embarrassment and did it without creating a show. Mary gave all the glory to Jesus and brought one of his signs to birth.

These two incidents invite us to evaluate the kind of favor we seek and the consequences it brings to our groups. Sometimes, we focus so much on the positions at the expense of service. We often spend much of the time rewarding our supporters, and other times, we focus on forming our own empires for future

support. This cycle continues.

Leadership office should be unifying rather than divisive. So, if one takes office and people feel scared for fear of oppression, there is something wrong.

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Since time immemorial, leaders have always emerged, and others have been chosen. Leadership is for service, not importance, as Jesus demonstrated at the Last Supper. This implies that leadership comes with responsibilities and obligations that the person occupying that office must undertake and fulfill.

That notwithstanding, leadership as a position comes with privileges not accessible to other members of the group. At face value, this makes leadership attractive to a mind only interested in making a name and material gain. However, the content of leadership is the heart of the matter.

Our religious communities are products of our society. Hunger for power is not an uncommon phenomenon among us. I have observed scenarios where much energy is spent on thinking and scheming for leadership positions in and out of election times rather than focusing on serving people. As a result, it has led to the creation of cliques that ensure their "person" gets into office for their own benefit.

It is very disheartening when we cannot engage with each other purely as fellow human beings for the sake of the common good. Instead, we often see each other in terms of power-seeking, turning each other into rivals. I have heard sentiments like, "Nowadays, so-and-so is dressing this way to appeal for votes," or at other times, someone is described as "always looking for power" just because they participate actively in a very heated debate meant to "improve our life together. "

This kind of environment is disruptive since it is hard to accept that people can act in the best interest of others without ulterior motives, and mistrust becomes the norm. Likewise, the focus on the mission shifts, and the vision becomes blurred. People's imaginations narrow to goals that suit individuals rather than the common good.

When the syndrome of the mother of the sons of Zebedee influences our choice of leaders, the guidance of the Holy Spirit is denied a chance. Suppose Jesus heeded her request; perhaps the likes of Peter would never have become leaders in Christ's church. Peter had limitations, but God saw tremendous potential in him. I am of the

opinion that honesty goes hand in hand with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as demonstrated by the community of the apostles when replacing Judas (Acts 1:21-26) .

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Jesus provides us with the criteria in his response to the mother of the sons of Zebedee. He could only assure them of the cup he had to drink, not the positions. Once we drink from the cup by becoming servants to all, all the other things will be added to us. Jesus and Mary are good leadership models, so we acclaim, "Jesus, have mercy on us," and "Mary, pray for us." They consistently listened to and heeded the Holy Spirit's prompting.