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A lesson on servant leadership

by Thomas C. Fox

NCR Today

One of the great treasures of our Web site is the archive we maintain of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's weekly homilies. The transcripts of his homilies are posted to our Web site on the Thursday after he delivers them. In a recent homily preached at St. Hilary Parish in Redford, Mich., Gumbleton spoke about the Vatican-declared "Year of the Priest," which began in June and runs until next summer.

He said, "I find it disappointing really that within our church right now there seems to be a movement to restore a certain kind of domination and status and power, if you will, to those who are to be the leaders of our communities ? ordained ministers."

In that homily, Gumbleton said that Jesus' message on leadership to his disciples is the story of washing of the feet in the Gospel: "He wasn't presiding, overseeing. He was acting as a servant. He had given up power. He didn't need power like that, the world's power.

"And here we are. Now they're talking about putting the altar rail back so that there is a barrier between the priest and the people. Make sure the priest is above, better, holier. [That's] not true.

"It's a community of disciples that Jesus calls together, where everyone is equal in freedom and dignity. No one is over others. But we seem to have fallen back into that pattern to have hierarchs in the church ? and obviously then lower-archs if you want to call them that ? the people in the pews.

"That's wrong. That's not the way Jesus intended it. We really have to struggle not to let that happen, because that is the only way that we are going to be a light to the world around us, if we really become a servant church and those leading in the church become servant ministers.

"Have we really heard this message of Jesus?" Gumbleton asked.

Read the full transcript here: Hierarchs and lower-archs in the church

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