Everyone wants to have a place. We want our parents and kids to love us. We want our friends to like us. I am reminded of that old tv show, Cheers. Its theme song went something like: "Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name." Nice! Sometimes it would be great to be in a place where *anybody* knows my name.

Scriptures today are filled with examples of people wanting a place and the ambition that comes with it. Over the last few weeks, we've heard about Jesus' wondrous deeds and miracles. Those were all signs showing us the reality of Jesus' mission. But last week, the mood changed. Jesus bluntly told his disciples that he must suffer and would be killed. You will remember the sharp exchange that set off with Peter. Peter insisted that it did not have to be that way. Jesus' response was direct. Get behind me! You are not thinking as God thinks!

So, that brings us to this week. In today's Gospel, we catch a couple of the disciples talking about "what now" after hearing the startling news from Jesus. They were having a side chat. They heard Jesus' words about with the "would be killed" part but missed the "rise in three days" part. Jesus asks the first-century version of the question: "What are you guys talking about?" The Gospel says they did not answer.

Jesus knew they were discussing who would be the greatest when He was gone. They were looking for some idea that they would have a good place. Would anybody know their name?

This kind of insecurity is common to all of us. It can be a mild and simple attempt to plan a future. It can also be extreme scheming to create advantage. The planning approach is called wisdom. The scheming approach unleashes envy and jealousy.

Each of the scriptures today addresses this need for position. In the first reading, we hear, "Let us beset the just one because he is obnoxious to us." Of course, we know those words describe what would happen to Jesus. The words could easily describe our world today, including our politics. The words "Let us condemn him to a shameful death" demonstrate the biting power of jealousy. Around us, we see people attack good people with words that kill reputations and well-being and good intent all the time!

St. James says in his letter, "Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice." He goes on to say, "the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace." This is wisdom!

Back to the disciples in this chat, they did not know what greatness was, but they would learn. Jesus heard them arguing about who should be first in the Kingdom of God. Jesus corrects them, saying that their ideas are backward. They should not worry about being first at somebody else's expense. The truth is, the first shall be last and servant to all. That is the call of a disciple. Our call. He put his arms around a child as an example. For Jesus to be great is to serve.

Bringing this home today, take a deep breath, and know you have a place here at St. Francis. Know that that membership extends everywhere in the Catholic Church and Body of Christ. If people don't know your name, know that we want to know who you are. Introduce yourself after mass to some new friends at coffee and donuts. We want to know your name. We believe in the truest sense of scripture that behind your name is a wonderful person. You have a place that we all gained at Baptism.

Preachers use the word “Baptism” often. But I can't remember the last time I heard words about what Baptism means from this pulpit. For most of us, Baptism was a long time ago. When I ask adults about what Baptism does, the response is usually "gets rid of original sin." True. But there is so much more. Bear with me now as we think about Baptism, not as a long-ago event but something alive and happening now.

In this parish, baptism really is now. We have families here who are bringing four children to be baptized. We start the baptism rite with the question, "what name do you give your child?" Think about it. The priority is, "who is this?" We want to know their name! Then we ask the parents, "What are you asking of the Church?" The answer is Baptism. But the meaning is, "We want our child to be part of this faith, this Church and this Body of Christ.

The signs and symbols that happen during Baptism give us a look at what Baptism is. First, it is a choice and commitment. The parents, on behalf of their children, say that they understand this. The parents promise to raise their children in the faith. Paramount in that is to teach them to love God and neighbor. Then godparents promise to help parents in raising these children in the faith. If you are asked to be a godparent, know what the actual job is. It's not just a card for birthdays and Christmas. It is being there for the parents, helping them with this critical job showing these children the path to love God and neighbor.

As the Baptism continues, we hear the word of God. Often the passage we hear is the one we heard today from Mark about bringing the little children. We then pray for the children and families. Then the signs begin. An anointing happens with the sign of oil on top of the child's breastplate. The prayer asks that the child be freed from original sin and the power of darkness. Think of this breastplate anointing like asking God to bring us a suit of armor to protect the child. The parents and godparents again speak for their child, rejecting evil and professing the faith. Then each child is brought to the font for the pouring of the water…. three times: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The signs continue with an anointing with sacred chrism that brings the child a share of Christ's role as priest, prophet, and king. I know most of us don't think of ourselves in those three roles, but we have them thanks to our Baptism. Then the child is clothed in a white garment and asked to see that garment as a sign of their Baptismal purity and bring that purity unstained into eternity. Then each receives a candle lit from the Easter candle. Parents and godparents are trusted to keep the flame of faith burning in their child's hearts. These signs are rich!

People wonder why we baptize infants. It is because it is never too early to welcome a child as a member of this faith. We are never fully grown either. Whether it is our wisdom, physical skills, or spirit, we are never finished products. Acts of the Apostles describes whole families being baptized. I am quite sure there were some little children in those families. It makes no sense to delay recognizing any person as a member of this Church who wants it. In the case of these children, the starting point is parents speaking for their children. Faster than they know, their children will begin speaking for themselves. When we parents start as good teachers, our children soon will be looking at the cross and proclaiming with their mouth, "This is the Lamb of God."

Most of us don't remember our baptism day—that day when we were the ones gaining a place. But be assured, every bit of this wonderful gift was given to us. Our job is to keep that gift alive. We need to stay close to this place and Christ and see the light. We need to keep the wonderful and pure goodness alive inside us and renew it through reconciliation when we need to. We need to keep and renew the flame of faith in our hearts through the sacraments and the word. We need to live up to our call as priest, prophet and king every day of our life.

The baptismal rite closes with my prayer for us today. "May the Lord God Almighty bless his faithful here present that always and everywhere we may be active members of his people."

All say, AMEN!