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Who is the greatest among you?

*“Now there was also a dispute among them,
as to which of them should be considered the greatest.”*

Luke 22:24

The first one

During the Passover meal the disciples were discussing – and disagreeing among themselves – about the question which one of them should be considered the first or the greatest in God’s kingdom. However, the kingdom of heaven cannot be compared to earthly kingdoms, because it is ruled by totally different laws. The Lord Himself acted in their midst like a Servant, and the disciples were to follow His example. He had put off His glory and taken the form of a bondservant (Phil. 2:7). He had even washed the feet of His followers. Although He was their Lord and Master, yet He gave them this example of humility in order for them to follow Him therein (John 13:1-17).

It is obvious that the Lord is the First in the midst of His own. He is the Firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29). In all things He should have the pre-eminence, in other words, be the First (Col. 1:18). Now if the First of all became a Bondservant, then what is our place to be? Then it is no longer important to us whether we take the second, third or fourth place among the Lord’s followers. It will be sufficient then to serve others and in doing so to glorify Christ.

The second one

Therefore we never hear of a brother Primus (= first) within the Christian church. We do read however, about a brother called Secundus (= second). We find his name in Acts 20:4. He was one of two believers from Thessalonica who accompanied Paul, together with some others, to Jerusalem at the close of his third missionary journey. He is also mentioned in the second place, after the other brother from Thessalonica, Aristarchus (= best ruler). Possibly, the latter was a more prominent brother; he also accompanied Paul on his trip to Rome (Acts 27:2).

Are we satisfied in occupying the second place, also in the work of the Lord? Do we agree if the Lord appoints others a more eye-catching and seemingly more important place? The Lord knows what is good for each one of us. We all are members of the one body of Christ. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. If one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it (1 Cor. 12:26).

The third one

There was yet another brother, who was called Tertius (= third). We might easily overlook him, but he really fulfilled a very important task, as he was Paul's secretary during his sojourn in Corinth (Rom. 16:22). It was in this city that Tertius wrote down the epistle to the Romans, and so we owe our knowledge of the great fundamental truths of the Gospel as explained in this letter, to him as well.

Let us go through these things once more: the Lord was the first One since He inspired Paul by the Spirit to write the letter to the Romans. Paul was the second instrument, for he was used by the Spirit to dictate the letter to his secretary. The words themselves were spiritual words, wisdom from the Spirit of God (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6-16). Tertius actually was the third writer, because he was used to write down these inspired words – these words of Scripture that laid the foundation of the Church through all the ages. What a tremendous task it was!

The fourth one

Finally, in Corinth there was a brother with the name Quartus (= fourth). At first glance, one wouldn't find anything special about him. He seems to have been less

important than Erastus, the treasurer of the city, who is mentioned in the same verse (Rom. 16:23). However, appearances are deceiving. Quartus had the honorary title “brother”. “Erastus (...) greets you, and Quartus, a brother”. So he too was a member of the family of God. Just as the apostles all the children of God enjoy fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3)! There is no greater privilege on earth than to be a part of this new congregation of people who together make up the family of the risen Lord, the fruit of the travail of His soul (Isa. 53:11; John 20:17). Let us, therefore, be happy with this honorary title “brother” or “sister”, even though our place in the Church of God might be the fourth or an even lesser place. To the Lord it does not make any difference.

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