

Homily Notes for Sunday, September 1, 2019 - 22nd in Ordinary Time

Topic: The Central Value of Humility in our Christian Lives

Readings: Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29; Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a; Luke 14:1, 7-14.

Summary: If we have no humility, we will have no holiness. No holiness, no heaven, nor any of the other benefits that this virtue brings us in our earthly life. Let us first define Humility. The let us first reflect on the message of each of the readings, then on several examples of humility in actual life.

Definition: Humility is the virtue by which a Christian acknowledges that God is the author of all good and that we are only creatures. Humility avoids *inordinate* ambition or pride, and provides the foundation for turning to God in prayer (CCC 2559). Voluntary humility can be described as "poverty of spirit" (CCC 2546). Our readings today demonstrate that humility is not only a virtue, but is also a means of opening our hearts, our minds and our hands to widows and orphans, the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

1. First Reading: Humility leads to great benefits. It will help us find favor with God, for he puts down the proud and lifts up the lowly. Being humble also can make us to be "loved more than a giver of gifts." Humility can also protect us from seeking that which is too far beyond us and can keep us open to wisdom that comes from outside us, especially from God. Knowing that we are dependent upon God can protect us from egotistically seeking freedom and pleasure, and give us a godly, self-discipline and stewardship of our whole self, not just for ourselves but also for the benefit of others. Just the action of taking advice is an act of humility. This leads to a positive self-image and deep good feelings that cannot be taken away.

2. Responsorial Psalm: This highlights how the "humble person" will imitate God in caring for the poor and the vulnerable. Our growth in virtue is not just for us but also to benefit others.

3. Second Reading: St. Paul in Hebrews gives a second profound reason for humility: we want to be humble because Jesus was humble. He left heaven and took human form, then suffering humiliation, persecution and the most painful of deaths (See Phil 2:5-11). We want to be like him so that we can be raised with him to glory. We have the opportunity to do this in every Mass. "At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess." Bowing during the Creed: "By the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man."

4. Gospel: Here Jesus shows a benefit of being humble in something as simple as "dining etiquette (See Prov 25:6-7 and Sir 3:17-20). How ironic in the reading, "Jesus went to dine... and the people there were observing him carefully..." Who was watching who? Jesus, the Son of God, was watching the proud and ambitious seek status and position, elbowing their way up to the head of the table - greater prestige, etc. How embarrassing to be seated up near the head of the table and then be asked to move. And because all the other seats are now taken, where do you have to go? To the very bottom.

6. Another key passage on humility: Phil 2:3-4.

"Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but (also) everyone (looking out) for those of others."

5. What is humility not?

a. Humility is not saying that I am worthless, without talents or ability. Humility requires a balanced and honest affirmation of one's abilities which we have been given by God, without exaggeration or without need for recognition.

b. Humility with a hook: This is when people are complimented for something good and they respond denying that it is such so that they are really soliciting further positive comments.

c. St Gregory the Great (Became Pope in 590. This book has been in print ever since). He contrasts the excessively humble with the haughty. "He who seeks the distinction of the office, cannot teach humility to his flock; he is rather a leader to perdition." "But there is another thing in these persons that we must consider well, namely, that frequently some deceive themselves by a semblance of humility, while others are led astray through ignorance of their own haughtiness." See Ancient Christian Writers, "Pastoral Care."

6. Three examples of practical humility; one in marriage, one from a bishop and one from a political leader.

a). Cardinal Leger's option for the poor: Here is a powerful man who did not seek the distinction of his office but led with humility. Most Rev. Paul-Émile Léger served as Archbishop of Montreal from 1950 to 1968, and was elevated to the cardinalate in 1953 by Pope Pius XII. He was one of the most powerful men in Canada and within the Catholic Church. He was a man of deep conviction and humility. Then on April 20, 1968 he resigned and laid aside his red vestments, crosier, miter, and pallium in his office at Montreal and disappeared. Years later he was found living among the lepers and disabled, outcasts of a small African village. When a journalist asked him, "Why?" Here is what Cardinal Leger had to say, "It will be the great scandal of the history of our century that 600 million people are eating well and living luxuriously and three billion people starve, and every year millions of children are dying of hunger. I am too old to change all that. The only thing I can do is be present. I must simply be in the midst of them. So, just tell people in Canada that you met an old priest. I am a priest who is happy to be old and still a priest and among those who suffer. I am happy to be here and to take them into my heart."

b). "Sir, I am a Corporal!" During the American Revolution, a man in civilian clothes rode past a group of soldiers who were busy pulling out a horse carriage stuck in deep mud. Their officer was shouting instructions to them while making no attempt to help. The stranger who witnessed the scene asked the officer why he wasn't helping. With great dignity, the officer replied, "Sir, I am a Corporal." The stranger dismounted from his horse and proceeded to help the exhausted soldiers himself. When the job was completed, he turned to the corporal and said, "My Corporal, next time you have a job like this, and don't have enough men to do it, inform your commander-in-chief and I will come and help you again." Too late, the proud Corporal recognized General Washington. Today's readings challenge us to be truly humble.

c. In a family argument to be willing to say: "I'm sorry; I was wrong; please forgive me."

7. Let us think beyond humility to the broader category of virtues: When asked to name **the four Cardinal Virtues**, St. Bernard of Clairvaux replied "humility, humility, humility, and humility. He said this because the word "cardinal" means "*hinge*." And everything hinges on humility. Humility opens the door to the hearts of others and to the heart of God. In spite of this, the Church identifies the cardinal virtues as Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance. How important would it be to know these and be able to live out these virtues in our daily lives?

The theological virtues are *faith, hope and love*.

Prudence is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it (CCC 1806)

Justice consists in the firm and constant will to give God and neighbor their due (CCC 1836).

Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life (CCC 1808).

Temperance moderates the attraction of the pleasures of the senses and provides balance in the use of created goods (particularly for food, drink, and sex)(CCC 1838).

8. Conclusion: What does it really mean to be an educated and well-formed person? How about growth in the virtues as the primary goal of becoming a mature, educated person?

May we be able to build this faith community in humility and holiness as we lay a deeper and more profound foundation in faith, as we lay a practical foundation for success in this life, especially in our chosen vocations, and continue to lay a spiritual foundation for the life to come!

9. Reflection Questions

1. What is a healthy humility and what might be elements of an unbalanced or excessive humility?
2. In what aspects of my life am I living out a godly humility, and where am I in danger?
3. In the aspects of being here in this parish campus, what are challenges to me in living the life of godly humility and virtue that Jesus wants me to live?
4. Am I persuaded that these Christian virtues are important enough to work hard for?

Additional passages on humility: 1 Peter 5:5-10; Js 4:6-12.

Text: Boys to Men: the transforming power of virtue, Tim Gray and Curtis Martin.

Rediscover Catholicism by Matthew Kelly; Ch 12 Confession: transforming weaknesses into strengths, p.151.

