

Homily For the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year C

St. Peter's Sunday 9:30, 11:30, 5:00 Masses - September, 2019

Sirach 3: 17-29 "The greater you are, the more you must humble yourself so you will find favour."

Psalms 68: "Let the righteous be joyful. Let them exult before God."

Hebrews 12: 18-19,22-24 "You have come to the city of the living God, to Jesus and the new covenant."

Luke 14:1,7-14 "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Pride and Humility

Introduction

If you looked at the readings today, you could have decided to go for a walk around the time they are being proclaimed. And maybe stay out there during the homily. The last thing anyone wants to hear is some arrogant preacher telling you how much you need to be humble.

During our formation to prepare for ordination to the diaconate, my group of those aspiring to be deacons practiced homilies on the Sunday readings. Whenever we came to readings like today, about humility and pride, someone would always begin: There's this guy, Mac Davis, who wrote a song that goes: "O Lord, it's hard to be humble, when you're perfect in every way. I can't wait to look in the mirror, cause I get better looking each day." Only my experience is that the last part is not true. Some would even sing it.

Of course, pride is a human character flaw from the beginning. Adam and Eve gave in to pride, thinking that they had figured out something that God didn't know. They had a better way. We hear that pride goes before a fall, and every sin begins with pride in some way or other.

Someone said that humility is the ability to act ashamed when you tell people how wonderful you are. Another saying is this: The proud man can learn humility, but he will be proud of it."

It seems we are kind of stuck. We know that pride is not holy and most of the time, it's not even attractive. But, today, with new technology, we have all these new behaviours that we wonder if we should question. Is it a problem if I take selfies with my pets, my kids, my friends or even the food I eat, then put them on Facebook or some other social media platform? The readings may not directly give the answer, but they help us go a little deeper into humility and pride and why this is so important.

Sirach

The writer of Sirach wanted to help his people live well. The early Church used the book extensively for that purpose. For us today, he makes several really good points.

1. The greater you are in the eyes of the world around you, the more you must humble yourself. If you don't, you will be unprepared to deal with any terrible thing that might happen to you. Pride is like an evil plant that roots itself in our hearts and makes it impossible for us to hear God's voice, especially in difficult times.

2. Humility is essentially favour with God, who knows our hearts. But it is also favour with those who are in harmony with God. God reveals the mystery of his life to the humble, not as a reward for their good behaviour, but because they are able to receive it.

A priest named Fr. Reilly says that humility is not about saying, I'm useless and have no gifts. The point is that God does not make garbage. We all have gifts that are precious to God, even if the world does not value them. True humility is recognizing that one's excellence comes directly and completely from God. Mary is our great example in this. All generations will call me blessed. Sounds arrogant but she follows immediately with The almighty has done great things for me and holy is his name. The truly humble person knows what gifts he or she has received and then knows how to use them.

Hebrews

The New Testament letter to the Hebrews can be tough sledding. Someone asked St. Augustine's why the Bible was so hard to understand. If God wants us to know him, why not make it easy to understand? His answer was that, if it was easy, we would become proud and think that we understood everything about God. But he wants us to be hungry to go deeper into the mystery which is God, and the reason he created us. That's the real treasure.

The writer compares the new covenant in Jesus, with the one made with the Old Testament people of God, especially at Mount Sinai. There, they were afraid of God because he came to them on the mountain with a dramatic display of fire and smoke and blaring trumpets. Terrified, the people begged to hear no further messages directly from God after he had uttered the ten commandments in a thunderous voice.

The new covenant, the new sacred bond God makes with his people today, comes to us through the one who was true humility. In the letter to the Philippians, it says of Jesus: Christ Jesus did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited or grasped at, but emptied himself, taking on human likeness. He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

That's the response humility calls forth in the new covenant. It's awe. It's worship because we know that his greatness doesn't put us down. It lifts us up. God wants to lift us up, but he can't do it if we are trying to make ourselves better than others. Through baptism and through faith, we are united to Christ. We have died with him a death to sin, including pride, and are raised to new life with him.

Readers are invited to join in the heavenly liturgy through prayer and sacramental worship. Sunday should be lived as a day of celebrating with the saints and angels in heaven. That's our destiny, but only if we are not too proud to receive it.

Luke

On the Sabbath, the Pharisees were watching Jesus closely to see if he followed all the details required by the law. They were watching him but he was watching them. He was watching their behaviour to see what was in their hearts about who is greater than who.

What he noticed disturbed him, so he told a story: Imagine being invited to a wedding. You think the host really likes you, that you are really important to him. You go to the banquet and there is a seat right next to the head table. You sit there until the host comes by with someone and says to you. Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't have names put on this table, but it's for my special guest here.

In front of everyone, you would have to walk the walk of shame to the only seat left, way at the back in the corner. On the other hand, imagine being asked to move closer to the host. That's the heart God invites us to have. That's the experience he wants for us. That's the mercy of God, who brought me into the light of his favour, even though I could not possibly deserve to be there on my own merit. One's social or economic position makes no difference to God. God will look favourably on works of mercy at the judgment.

Call To Action

C.S. Lewis writes that God wants you to know Him: wants to give you Himself. And, if you really get into any kind of touch with Him you will, in fact, be humble, having the freedom to get rid of the silly nonsense about your own worth which has made you restless and unhappy all your life.

Another writer says: "Humility isn't thinking less of yourself. It's thinking of yourself less." It has nothing to do with high or low self-esteem. That's what happens with shaming on the internet.

Pope Francis declared today a day of prayer for the care of creation. This is another opportunity for humility. Historically, western culture has seen nature as ours to exploit, often ruthlessly and carelessly. Today we are praying for the

humility to see ourselves, not as Lords of creation, but its caretaker and steward. It is a gift to us that we are privileged to be a part of.

Here is a thought that we might go away with today. It comes from Bishop Robert Barron. We will be presenting his series on the mass starting later this month. This is a spoiler alert. He points out that we begin every mass with the sign of the cross. When we come to mass, we lay down our pride. For a short time, we can stop worrying about our reputation and our status in the world. We let go of our name and take on God's name. I don't come to mass in Stephen's name. I come in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The sign of the cross is an act of humility. I stop worrying about whether the sun will come out or whether people like me and worship the one who says: You are my beloved son. You are my beloved daughter. I made you to know that love and to live in it. He bled and died to take away my sin, to make me whole. O Lord, how great thou art.

In your name, I receive the gift of yourself that you offer me, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.