

Homily for February 28, 2019

Thursday of the 7th week of Ordinary Time

It's difficult to underestimate the value of salt. This common substance not only flavors and preserves our foods and melts ice on the roads in winter; it is also a very effective cleanser. Massage therapists will often use salt scrubs to unclog a person's pores and rub away dead, hardened skin.

Just before Jesus talked to his disciples about the value of being salted, they had been arguing about who was the greatest among them. Jesus reminded them that whoever wants to be first must be last and the servant of all (Mark 9:33-37). He taught them that humility and self-giving are the pathway to true greatness. Why is this so? Because humble service acts as a salt scrub. It rubs away selfishness, self-promotion, and boasting. It unclogs in us what pride and sin have covered over. More than anything else, humility can cleanse and purify us of everything that pollutes or degrades the life of God in us. It seems ironic, but humility lifts us up; it reveals our true beauty as children of God.

You don't have to look far to find opportunities to humble yourself and serve other people. According to St. Francis de Sales, "Great occasions for serving God seldom come, but little ones surround us daily." Kindness to an irritable spouse, patience with a slow driver, and encouragement to a struggling co-worker are all little acts of service. Offering to empty the dishwasher, pick up the dry cleaning, and pour someone a second cup of coffee—these small personal acts can help you keep "salt" in yourself—and they can promote peace with those around you. Through them, you are offering your life to God and to his people—and that's always a beautiful sight!¹

Such humility is the opposite of the attitude represented in our Sirach reading for today. Here Wisdom counsels us to not be puffed up with pride because of material security:

**Do not rely on your wealth,
or say, "I have enough."
2 **Do not follow your inclination and strength
in pursuing the desires of your heart.**
3 **Do not say, "Who can have power over me?"**²**

We are not to put all of our confidence in money to make us independent of God, so that we disregard and ignore him.

Nor are we to be presumptuous by taking advantage of God's mercy:

¹ Taken from <https://wau.org/meditations/>

² *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. (1993). (Sir 5:1–3). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

***Do not say, “I sinned, yet what has happened to me?”
for the Lord is slow to anger.
5 Do not be so confident of forgiveness
that you add sin to sin.
6 Do not say, “His mercy is great,
he will forgive the multitude of my sins,”
for both mercy and wrath are with him,
and his anger will rest on sinners.³***

Here the attitude is like a person who goes to confession but has no intention to amend their life. Their thought is, God will forgive me.... That what he is there for and I will keep on sinning because that is what I am here for!

Paul in Romans faces this same attitude. Having just finished talking in depth about Jesus’ mercy he asks:

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.⁴

Those who are walking in newness of life will have us put to death puffed up pride and presumptuous indifference to sin. Rather we will want to be salted with humility.

Today, ask the Holy Spirit to lead you into three different situations in which you can be of humble service. Then let God direct your steps to those places where you are most needed. Don’t dismiss anything he leads you to, even if it seems insignificant or distasteful. You never know; it just might be the thing that cleanses you the most. God wants you to grow in his life. There’s no better way than being “scrubbed” with the salt of service!⁵

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Sir 5:4–6). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Ro 6:1–4). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁵ <https://wau.org/meditations/>