

The little way that is humility

Homily for March 16, 2022
Wednesday Week 2 of Lent

It's been said that humility is like a slippery watermelon seed. Once you get it under your finger and you think you have it, it slips away from your grasp.

If pride is the capital sin, humility is the capital virtue. I love this title St Therese of Lisieux gave to herself. She died at 24 and called herself the "Little Flower". She loved flowers and saw herself as the "little flower of Jesus," who gave glory to God by just being her beautiful little self among all the other flowers in God's garden. Because of this beautiful analogy, the title "little flower" remained with St. Therese.

How different St Therese was from the Mother of James and John whose prideful question showed how much she and her boys misunderstood the work and mission of Jesus. Rather than entering into the way of serving, they wanted to be served, and it seems the rest of the Apostolic Band had the same attitude because of their indignation with James and John's request. Like the watermelon seed, just when they thought they were learning the way of humility, it slipped from their grasp because they were still filled with pride.

But true humility they would learn.

We know that St. James would be martyred as the first of the Twelve to meet his death violently around the year 44 AD. He is put to death by King Herod who was deemed by the people to have the voice of a god and not a man. St Luke tells us in Acts that upon receiving from the crowds this title of a god that:

Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give God the glory; and he was eaten by worms and died.

The first century Jewish historian Josephus adds to the account of Herod's death by telling us:

And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age, and in the seventh year of his reign."

Luke then tells us:

²⁴ But the word of God grew and multiplied. ¹

Unlike his brother James, John was not martyred for the faith. In Revelation 1 he tells us:

¹ [*The Holy Bible*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Ac 12:24). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

⁹ I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus²

What the scripture teaches us is that although when mom asks on behalf of her boys, when they are in their early 20s there is much pride in their hearts, by the time they were older they had learned the way of humility so that it no longer slipped from their grasp. This is because now their focus was not in their works and words but on Jesus, the Word!

And yet in a world like this, the way of the humble is often resisted as we heard in our reading from Jeremiah. As the prophet of God he calls the people to take up the humble seed of humility but repeatedly it slipped from their grasp because they would not heed the Word. They declare:

Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah, for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us strike him with the tongue, and let us not heed any of his words.”

How stubborn we can be and willful in our refusal to heed the Word Jesus. . But when we learn the way of St. Therese and surrender our willfulness as did James and John what do we discover about the gift of humility?

I like this answer from a book called *Divine Intimacy*:

Humility makes us realize that, in the sight of God, we are only His little creatures, entirely dependent upon him for our existence and for all our works. Having received life from God, we cannot subsist one moment independently of him. He who gave us existence by his creative action, maintains us by his conserving action.

I love this! The humble realize we are only here because he created us, and we can only continue to live because we understand he conserves our lives. That we are his little creatures allowed St. Therese to live her short life as a beautiful little flower. The way of humility is less likely to slip through our fingers when like her we can say:

What pleases Jesus is to see me love my littleness and poverty, the hope I have in his mercy. This is my only treasure.

² [*The Holy Bible*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Re 1:9). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.