

Homily for Wednesday Third Week of Easter

Acts 8:1b–8

Psalm 66:1–3a, 4–7a

John 6:35–40

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus say:

for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

This is the Mission Statement of our Lord Jesus. It illustrates the humility that encompassed his whole ministry. He came to do only the will of the Father. This epitomizes what it means to be humble.

I want to talk with you this morning about humility, but in order to do this I need to begin by talking about pride.

Of the seven deadly sins, pride is the number one sin. What is pride? It is arrogating to oneself the unique prerogatives of God. Genesis uses the picture of Adam and Eve grasping at the fruit of the tree of the knowledge good and evil. They want to determine for themselves what is good and evil. In the words of the serpent, by so doing they will become like God. Here is the sin of pride writ large.

It is worth noting that in Revelation 12, it is St. Michael the archangel who battles the prince of pride, Lucifer. The name "Michael" means "Who is like God"? His name is a taunting challenge directed at Lucifer and all who would allow for the pride of life to displace God.

This grasping at the knowledge of good and evil is a very contemporary attitude. Back in 1992 the US Supreme Court in a ruling called "Casey versus Planned Parenthood" wrote:

At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence of the meaning of the universe of the mystery of human life.

That is the Mission Statement of so many today. Think about how over the past twenty years this concept of liberty has come to define how the majority of people see themselves.

What is the real problem with pride? It is boring. When you arrogate to yourself to prerogatives of God you have, in the words of St Augustine, become *Incurvatus in se*". This is a theological phrase describing a life lived "inward" for self rather than "outward" for God and others.

Now here is the real problem with pride. It is to choose to live in your own ego drama rather than in God's theo drama. How wonderful when you can break out of the ego drama. How boring this is when compared with the theo drama. The theo drama is the story God is producing, that God is writing and directing. You have a role in this but God is the producer director and writer. When you surrender to this drama you now begin to live. When we live in the ego drama we are

like people on a bus going through the most beautiful country side. But we have the shades pulled down and we are fighting about who will have the first seat on the bus.

Now what is the antidote to pride? It is humility. A word that comes from the Latin *humilitas*, which comes from the root word *humus*, which means “of the ground, of the earth.” To be humble is to be close to the earth, to really live.

In Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Purgatory is depicted as a seven story mountain, representing the seven deadly sins, of which souls need to be purged before they can enter paradise. The prideful have to carry great boulders on their backs. Why? The boulders purposefully push these souls down to the earth, to the ground so they can get to the reality of things. This is humility what it means to be a human being.

St. Augustine vividly contrasts pride and humility this way:

When a physician in the treatment of a disease cures certain outward symptoms but not the cause that produces them, his cure is only temporary. So long as the cause remains, the disease may return. ... That the cause then of all diseases, that is, pride, might be eradicated, the Son of God humbled himself. Why are you proud, O man? The Son of God humbled himself for you. It might shame you, perhaps, to imitate a humble man; but imitate at least a humble God. ... And this is the proof of his humility.

May we with St. Michael ask: “Who is like God”? and learn the humble way of Jesus who said:

for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.