



Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time July 9, 2017 A

- ◆ “What is hidden from the wise and learned, you have revealed to the little ones.”
- ◆ “Jesus, gentle and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine.”
- ◆ “Take my yoke upon you”
- ◆ Three American Christian witnesses

The following are some reflections on the above three verses which we have heard in today’s Gospel.

“What is hidden from the wise and learned”

Jesus is confronted by people who have closed their minds and hearts to his message. These “know-it-alls” are unreceptive to Jesus’ words and works. In contrast to these supposedly “wise” and “learned” people, Jesus gives thanks to God for the “little ones” who open their minds and hearts to his message. Jesus speaks of God “hiding” his revealed truth from the learned, which could be interpreted as God having a prejudice against bright or learned people. But it is rather a false interpretation. After all, it was God who created some people with a high I.Q. and helped them become exceptionally smart.

Jesus is not saying that learned and wise people cannot comprehend his teaching and that the uneducated are guaranteed an understanding. The people who will understand and be transformed by Jesus’ teachings are those who approach him with an open mind and heart—whether they have a low or high I.Q. These “little ones” are endowed with a *teachable spirit*. They are the very opposite of the “know-it-alls.” St. Thomas Aquinas was a genius. St. John Vianney, Cure of Ars, on the other hand, was anything but bright. It took him forever to get through the seminary. While poles apart on the intellectual level, these two saintly men had one thing in common: they both had a teachable spirit and they hungered to know God.

We might ask ourselves: To what extent do we approach the Scriptures with an open and receptive heart? Do we

come to the table of God’s Word asking him to reveal to us something new and fresh from a verse we have heard many times before? Or do we tend to dismiss it as just another of those frequently proclaimed passages that we think we know the meaning of and wonder if there’s anything new in it for us? If we come with open and prayerful hearts, we can count ourselves amongst the “little ones” that Jesus is praising God for today. But if we come thinking the Gospel has nothing to teach us, we can count ourselves amongst “the learned” and “wise” whom Jesus condemns.

Gentle and humble of heart

Also in today’s Gospel, Jesus refers to himself as “*meek and humble of heart*.” In today’s world, “meekness” and “humility” are two qualities that people do not consider important, especially in leaders. Yet Jesus obviously believes these qualities to be integral to all would-be-disciples.

In his reflection on this part of today’s Gospel, Fr. Flor McCarthy writes:

To be gentle is not necessarily to be weak. In fact, gentleness is a form of strength. Take the hands of a mother or surgeon. Here it is gentleness that counts, not brute force. A storm breaks flowers, whereas a gentle sun gets them to open and grow. Without gentleness, we cannot help others to grow or develop. All we will do is make them withdraw further into their shells.

And take humility. Again, in today’s competitive world, it would seem to make about as much sense as a parachute to a deep-sea diver. Today, you are told to project yourself if you want to make it. And yet, humility is not a form of weakness. “Loving humility is a powerful force and there is nothing in the world like it.” Humility is the foundation on which to build the house of the spirit. Humble people know that before God they are poor, weak, and vulnerable. They do not build on false things. When we are empty, God can fill us. When we are weak, God can strengthen us.

To the **gentle and humble**, Jesus promises peace of soul. It is because we know so little about being gentle with one another that we have so much trouble in our homes and in the world. We want to dominate others. It is because we know so little about humility that we have so little peace within ourselves and with others. Proud and arrogant people do not bring peace. They spread confusion and unrest by projecting onto others their own anger and frustrations. Humble people disarm others and bring out the best in them.

“My burden is light,” says Jesus. If we listen to him, we will not only sweeten our burdens, but our whole lives. He will carry us when we are weak. He will calm us when we are troubled and afraid. And he will help us to have a compassionate heart toward others. He will make us want to lighten their burdens where we can. Solidarity doubles joy and halves sorrow.

“Humility is the land where God wants us to go and offer sacrifice.” (Thomas Merton)

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“Humbition” - a way to combine humility, gentleness and ambition

Commenting on today’s Gospel, Fr. William Byron, S. J. writes:

I would suggest a new and unfamiliar word for your consideration today. It offers a key to how the Christian in the world of work—in the real world of Monday-through-Friday, nine-to-five, paycheck-responsibility days that are more than familiar to you—a key to how you can hold onto your basic Christian values—humility and gentleness—and still be effective, indeed successful, in meeting what we like to think of as our “real world” responsibilities. And that word is “humbition.” It is an amalgam of two words— “humility” and “ambition.” You have to be humbitious in order to be successful; you should be humbitious if you want to be Christlike in the world of work. He was surely humble. He was also ambitious for the salvation of the world, for the coming of the promised kingdom, for the salvation of souls.

So, be humble; and be ambitious for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. This will work for you at every stage of life, even in retirement. Think “humbition” and you will be on the right track to a good

and richly rewarding life, remembering, of course, that when weariness sets in and the burdens become heavy, Jesus, the model of humbition, is there waiting to hear from you and more than ready to help.

“Take my yoke upon you ...”

One of the things Jesus rails against is the way the Pharisees and Scribes have made the law of Moses (intended to free people) into a heavy burden or yoke that weighs people down. The Pharisees and Scribes have added on hundreds of laws and prescriptions around the Ten Commandments. Speaking to this, Jesus says; “They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear and lay them on men’s shoulders.” To the average Jew in Jesus’ time, religion is a thing of endless rules. People live their lives in a world of regulations that dictate their every action. What a heavy burden religion is.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus bids the weary people to exchange their burdensome *yoke* for the one he offers. What is the ‘yoke’ which Jesus offers us? Scripture scholar Fr. John Meier writes: “*Central to the law or yoke of Jesus is Jesus himself. Since he embodies all he teaches and commands, the pupil must study him and his meekness toward people.*” The ‘rest’ for our souls which Jesus gives is security and peace for following the path of goodness. “*Rest*” is also understood as God’s gift to those who remain faithful to their covenant relationship with him and enjoy the constancy of his presence (Ex. 33:12-14).

Three American Christian Witnesses

Robert Ellsberg, who spent time working with Dorothy Day in Manhattan, has written a book called *Blessed Among Us—Day by Day with Sainly Witnesses*. In the book, he places before us canonized and uncanonized witnesses to Christ. Also included are some non-Catholic witnesses like Martin Luther King and some non-Christian witnesses like Gandhi. Beginning this week and continuing for the next few weekends, I will include in my columns witnesses whose feast day occurs at this time.

Servant of God Rose Hawthorne, July 9 (1851-1926) Founder, Servants of Relief for Incurable Cancer

Rose Hawthorne was the third and favorite child of Nathaniel Hawthorne, the great American writer. He

died when she was thirteen, a loss compounded a few years later by the death of her mother. Bereft, Rose accepted the proposal of the writer George Lathrop, whom she married in 1871 soon after her twentieth birthday. They had a son who died at the age of five. Rose's marriage gradually deteriorated, largely due to Lathrop's alcoholism. For a time their common attraction to Catholicism held promise of restoring their relationship. In 1891 they were both received into the Catholic Church, yet two years later they formally separated.

Finding herself alone in New York City, Rose felt called to some more heroic expression of her faith. In becoming aware of the plight of impoverished cancer patients banished to die in isolation on Blackwell's Island, she found her calling.

After obtaining a nursing degree, she began visiting and then inviting cancer patients to share her own apartment. This became a full-time occupation. Following Lathrop's death, she formalized her vocation by entering religious life. In 1900 she and a companion were received into the Dominican Order. Six years later, her own Dominican Congregation was established, and she became known as Mother Alphonsa.

She died at age 75 on July 9, 1926, at the Motherhouse of her Congregation in Hawthorne, New York. Her cause for canonization is in process.

"I am trying to serve the poor as a servant. I wish to serve the cancerous poor because they are more avoided than any other class of sufferers; and I wish to go to them as a poor creature myself." -Servant of God Rose Hawthorne

Servant of God Augustus Tolton, July 10 (1854-1897) First black priest in America

Augustus Tolton was born a slave in Missouri in 1854. His mother escaped during the Civil War, taking her three children north to Quincy, Illinois. There Augustus was educated in a Catholic school. He decided to become a priest but no seminary would take him. After private tutorials with a local priest, he was accepted at a small Franciscan school and eventually studied at the Urban College in Rome. Expecting to be assigned as a missionary to Africa, he was instead sent back to the United States to work among the struggling black Catholic population.

Tolton was appointed pastor of a black parish in his hometown of Quincy, where his effective preaching drew many white parishioners—a source of resentment on the part of neighboring white priests. Eventually, he was assigned to a parish in Chicago, yet a sense of isolation

remained, the burden of being the only black priest in America. He died on July 9, 1897, at the age of 43.

Tolton is remembered today as a pioneer, the first black priest in America who fully identified with and sought to represent the aspirations of African American Catholics. He exposed the presence of racism in the Church while striving to witness to an ideal of equality and reconciliation within the Body of Christ. His cause for canonization was introduced in 2011.

"America has been called the most enlightened nation in the world. We shall see whether it deserves that honor. If the United States has never before seen a black priest, it must see one now." -Fr. Augustus Tolton

Cicely Saunders, July 14 (1918-2005) Pioneer of the Hospice Movement

Cicely Saunders—nurse, social worker and physician—is recognized as the founder of the modern hospice movement, a holistic approach to care for the dying that combines expert pain management with loving and compassionate care. Saunders' interest in this area was stimulated in part by the death of two very close friends. Working in hospitals, she was discouraged by the common attitude, in the face of terminal illness, that "nothing more can be done" whereas, she believed, there was always "so much more to be done." Believing that a patient was more than a collection of symptoms, she promoted an approach that addressed the full needs of her patients and their families, including social, emotional, and spiritual needs.

In 1967 she founded St. Christopher's hospice in London, the first dedicated institution of its kind. Saunders had undergone a deep religious conversion in her youth—as if "a switch had flipped." She considered founding an Anglican order to staff the hospice but decided instead that it should be a place where people of all faiths or no faith should feel welcome.

She received numerous national honors and humanitarian awards as well as the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. Dame Cicely died of breast cancer in her own hospice on July 14, 2005.

"You matter because you are you, and you matter to the end of your life. We will do all we can not only to help you die peacefully, but also to live until you die."

-Cicely Saunders

Have a blessed week,

