



Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time C September 1, 2019

Humility

- ◆ The foundational virtue of the spiritual life
- ◆ 9 ways humility can help us in our daily lives

The opening verse of today's first reading exhorts us all to: "Conduct your affairs with humility and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts. Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find favor with God."

In the Gospel, Jesus proclaims: "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Spiritual masters tell us that *humility* is the *foundational* virtue of the spiritual life. It is the virtue on which all other virtues are built. Just as pride is often seen as the root of all sins, humility is seen as the root of all other virtues. St. Augustine, the great spiritual master, observed: "It was pride that caused the fall. If you ask me what are the ways of God, I would tell you that the first is humility, the second is humility and the third is humility."

What is humility?

In his *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas, the great medieval theologian, described *humility* as *seeing ourselves as God sees us. Humility means knowing that every good we have comes from God as gift, that we depend on him for everything.* The Little Flower, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, wrote: "The beginning of all holiness is humbly admitting that without God we can do nothing, but that with, in and through him, everything is possible."

St. Teresa of Avila defined humility in one word: *truth*. Humility is accepting the truth about ourselves. This means accepting our *strengths, limitations* and *weaknesses, knowing, of course, that our strengths come from God. Denying either our strengths or limitations is a form of pride.*

Alcoholics Anonymous spirituality is built on humility. A.A. people know that at the heart of their program is the humble and honest admission that they are powerless over their addiction and that God can

and will grant them the power to overcome their struggle with a particular weakness.

C.S. Lewis said: "*Humility is not thinking badly about yourself. It is thinking less about yourself. Humility is at work when we are the last thought on our minds. However, this does not mean neglecting appropriate self-care, such as a good night's sleep, proper diet and time for relaxation.*"

Nine ways the virtue of humility can help us in our daily lives

The practice of humility will be enormously helpful to our daily lives.

- The *humble person* doesn't get upset if he/she is overlooked or not recognized.
- The *humble person* doesn't care that others get the credit for his/her work.
- The *humble person* has no problem accepting his/her need for help, be it God's help or human help.
- The *humble person* knows his/her limitations and weaknesses, and acts accordingly.
- The *humble person* doesn't have a problem accepting criticism or affirmation from others. After all, humility is truth and we should rejoice if others can help us to see our limitations and strengths.
- The *humble person* readily admits any wrongdoing and doesn't hesitate to ask for forgiveness.
- The *humble person* knows his/her strengths and offers to use them where they can benefit the community. The *falsely* humble person doesn't recognize his/her strengths.
- The *humble person* is not concerned about his/her image before others.
- The *humble person* is comfortable with who he/she is and doesn't care much if that is not acceptable to other people. The *humble person* also seeks to improve and grow in maturity.

Talking about not worrying over what people think of us reminds me of the story of two senior citizens who

were discussing on the wisdom and humility that come with age. One volunteered, "When I was young, I was very proud. I was constantly worrying about what other people thought about me. When I got older and wiser, I said to myself, 'I don't care what they think about me.' And now that I'm even older and wiser, I realize they weren't thinking about me at all."

A wonderful by-product of humility is the freedom to be who we truly are. Humility is indeed a wonderful virtue to cultivate. The practice of humility will make our lives and relationships much easier. Just think about it, when we can humbly admit wrongdoing, we pull the carpet from under the devil who wants to keep us stubborn and righteous and whose aim is to destroy our relationships. When we practice humility, we do not feel resentful whenever we are overlooked or slighted in some way. We should regularly pray for the grace of humility and be grateful for the opportunities that come our way to put it into action.

A good one-liner prayer is:

*"Jesus, meek and humble of heart,
make my heart like unto thine."*

Reflecting on today's first reading, Indian priest Fr. Vima Dasan, S.J., writes:

"Genuinely humble people look at the heights and depths of their personalities without becoming proud or discouraged and win favour with God and men."

Do we want to be happy, successful, with a good reputation? Then, we need to "conduct our affairs with humility" (Sir 3:17). The clothing of humility can never go out of style in a Christian world. But the fact is that humility as a virtue has fallen on hard times in our day, while arrogance and aggression, pride and pomp, self-righteousness and self-assertiveness are being paraded as marks of the modern culture, which abhors all simplicity and simplification. Yet humility remains at the root of the Christian life, in which the great Gospel reversals still rank first: to lose one's life is to find it; the last shall be the first; "the humble shall be exalted" (Lk 14:11). However, Sirach and Jesus are teaching us not some kind of pseudo-humility, but genuine humility. Pseudo-humility is pretentious self-effacement and a phony denial of all our gifts, virtues and talents; and hence it is like a good apple rotten at the heart.

Genuine humility is not something forced from outside. At times, you see some people playing a humble role, because they have to. I am reminded of the man and his wife who went to church one day. Out loud, the man prayed: "Oh, Lord, make me successful and please keep me humble." His wife kneeling beside him, chimed in with a somewhat corrective plea: "Oh, Lord, you make him successful; I will keep him humble." True humility is one's own personal recognition of one's true status before God. As Christians who have personally recognized our true status, we will joyfully accept all our gifts, talents and abilities as coming from God and will use them for our own enrichment and for the glory of God. But at the same time we will not deny [our] human limitations and weaknesses; we will not rely solely on our own strength, neither will we "seek things beyond [our] strength" (Sir 3:21); we will candidly admit that we are sinners, but forgiven sinners, while at the same time recognizing our continued need for forgiveness. Thus genuine humility is like darkness that reveals the heavenly light, in which humble people look at the heights and the depths of their personalities without becoming proud and discouraged.

It is wise to stay humble, lest we stumble. We need to stay humble also for the rewards it brings. A humble person "wins esteem of his fellow guests" (Lk 14:10); sincere humility attracts but lack of it detracts. Besides, the humble person who often looks up to God rarely looks down on anyone, especially if they were poor, and thus the humble can have more friends. This is why the world considers an able yet humble person as a jewel worth a kingdom. Also humble people "find favour with God" (Sir 3:18), because humility is that low, sweet root from which all heavenly virtues shoot. Pope John XXIII once remarked, "Anybody can be Pope, the proof of this is that I have become Pope." Any great personality like him is humble, for greatness goes with humility. Anyone puffed up by their "greatness" is like an empty vessel that rattles its small coins noisily. Pride goes before destruction and hence must be kept deflated. A big truck got stuck under a low overhead bridge. Nobody knew what to do, until a small boy suggested that they let the air out of the tires. This done, the truck, now a couple of inches lower, grazed through. A bit of deflation can help us all at times (His Word Lives, pp 369-370).

Some other quotes on humility

As long as you are proud, you cannot know God.
- C. S. Lewis

*There is something in humility
which strangely exalts the heart.*
- St. Augustine

*True humility is intelligent self-respect which keeps
us from thinking too highly or too meanly of
ourselves.
It makes us modest by reminding us how far
we have come short of what we can be.*
- Ralph W. Sockman

*Humility is not cowardice. Meekness is not weakness.
Humility and meekness are indeed spiritual powers.”*
- Swami Sivananda

*You should not gloat about anything you have done;
rather you ought to keep going
and find something better to do.*
- David Packard, Co-founder of Hewlett-Packard

*Something happens when we approach situations
from a perspective of humility:
it opens us up to possibilities,
as we choose open-mindedness and curiosity
over protecting our point of view.*
- Bruna Martinuzzi

*I have learned from the lives of great leaders that
true greatness comes from humility.*
- Patrick Daniel, CEO

I believe we have seen the truth of the above sayings
in the papacy of Pope Francis.

Have a humble-filled week,

Fr. Sean