

46 Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C September 1, 2019  
Sirach 3:17-20,28-29 Psalm 68 Hebrews 12:18-19,22-24 Luke 14:1,7-14

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus addresses *pride*, which is the first of the seven deadly mortal sins. We begin to see the separation of God from the Jewish people through their sin of pride. Jesus is invited to a banquet to share a meal with the lawyers and Pharisees at "*the house of one of the leading Pharisees.*" What does Jesus see when He arrives at the banquet? The guests are pushing themselves forward, scrambling for the best seats and skillfully maneuvering themselves into the places of honour.

While this is going on, the Pharisees are watching Jesus closely, trying to catch Him in some violation of the Mosaic Law. They are hostile toward Jesus because they think Jesus is threatening their position of power. The Pharisees pride themselves on their knowledge and observance of the Law, so much so that they think nobody else can possibly know it or observe it as perfectly as they do.

The Pharisees also pride themselves in their belief that they have not committed any sins. Jesus tells a parable that is directed to the Pharisees and the guests. In the parable, Jesus warns us against all forms of pride and self-glorification. Proud people are generally very focused on whatever serves their best interests instead of focusing on others and humbly serving them.

As people who desire to follow Jesus as our Master, we need to be aware of the ways we operate out of pride. There is so much in our human nature that prevents us from acknowledging our true condition. Recognizing these attitudes of pride can be a doorway to a deeper union with Christ as we seek to follow Him.

Today, the sin of pride may come in different forms which lead to self-glorification. Pride can show itself when people get into arguments and have to prove that they are right. Pride can even display itself when there is a reluctance to change.

Many people claim God's gifts of knowledge, good health, employment, or even an abundant garden, as their own gifts, without realizing that without God, they would not have any such gifts. Our achievements should be opportunities not for pride but for thanksgiving. Pride causes us to reject our dependency on God.

Pride can show itself in our not helping those who need our help. Pride can show itself when we tell a lie instead of speaking the truth. Pride can show itself when we gossip about someone and think we are better than that person. Pride is not thinking I am better than others but thinking too much about myself. It is a preoccupation with one's self. When people get puffed up with self-importance because of pride, they essentially cause terrible suffering in families, in communities and in our church.

In God's eyes the vain person takes a very lowly place because God rejects the one who is proud and He raises the one who is humble. Humility is at the core of our holiness, the power behind our spiritual strength. It is through humility and obedience to God that the devil is defeated.

The First Reading from the Old Testament Book of Sirach teaches us to live our life with humility, that is, without pretense, neither inflating nor deflating our achievements. The writer calls us to be honest about ourselves, and writes, "My child, perform your tasks with humility; then you will be loved by those whom God accepts."

What is humility? Humility is an attempt to try and see ourselves as God sees us. Humility takes an honest measure of ourselves without being boastful, pompous or proud, realizing that we are who we are before God and nothing more. It is an admission that our talents come from God who has seen fit to work through us. With humility, we use God's gifts for the good of our family and the good of our community and the good of our church.

The tendency of the world is to scorn the humble. To be humble does not get a very high rating in today's world of power and privilege and with those who push themselves forward to have the places of honour in our society. Often to be humble is associated with someone who is weak and who has a poor self-image, *but* in actuality it is none of these things.

The world does not value or understand the power of humility but we do, because it was what Jesus used to save us. Humility seems to contradict leadership, and yet there was no stronger leader than Jesus. Jesus was "*meek and humble of heart*" (Matthew 11:29). Jesus tells us that humility is other-thinking, caring for and about others for no other reason than to love our brothers and sisters in Christ and to love God.

Since the humble are secure in themselves, they are strong. Since they have nothing to prove, they don't have to show their strength or use it to dominate others. Humility leads to meekness. *But meekness is not weakness.* Rather, meekness is strength under control, power used to build up rather than tear down. Jesus says, "*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.*" (Matthew 5:5)

A humble person is one who is modest in spirit, is respectful of his or her brothers and sisters in Christ and who daily depends on God. A humble person is one who *wants* to go to Confession regularly in order to restore God's grace. When we confess our sins, we grow in humility. When we regularly say "*Bless me, Father, for I have sinned,*" and then humbly confess our sins, we can grow in compassion for others, and become slower in judging our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we humbly let go, and admit the reality of our sinfulness, then we can truly be set free.

The humble are able to truly listen to someone with genuine interest and to delight in the other person's goodness. The humble are the people who give you their undivided attention and make you feel special and appreciated. The humble take delight in praising God and affirming people.

One of the most important aspects of this humble relationship is that we turn from our proud ways and change. Humility does not only change us, it also affects those around us. Our family, our community and our church are all stronger when we care about the needs of other members.

There is a deeper humility about our soul that comes from the Cross. The Crucifix is a great teacher of humility. When we compare ourselves to people around us and begin to feel self-righteous, we should always look at the *love* we see on the Cross. It shows all of us the distance we have yet to go to be like Our Lord whom we follow.

Humility is not just truth about ourselves or the state of our soul but also about our need of God's grace. In the Gospel today, Our Lord is not giving a lesson in social climbing but a call for us to be honest about the state of our soul. When our pretense and arrogance are gone, then we are wide open to God's grace and His call to come higher to real spiritual growth. Humility is a virtue which we should pray for and which we should seek to develop.

Humility, the virtue of truth about ourselves, our soul and our need of God's grace, doesn't keep us from fooling God because we can't fool God. Humility keeps us from fooling ourselves, whereas those who are vain make fools of themselves. Vanity clouds their spiritual vision, deluding them into thinking they are their own gods. God loves the humble; that is why Jesus made this promise: "Blessed are the poor [the humble] in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3)

Jesus could speak about humility because He had learned to be humble before His Father. While He walked the earth, Jesus gave all He had by embracing His Father's will instead of His own self-interest. For this perfect humility, the Father exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name which is above all names (Philippians 2:9-11).

The central message in today's Gospel is the capital sin of pride and the opposite virtue of humility. Let us pray that we will seek to develop a spirit of humility in our lives. Examine your conscience and ask God's forgiveness for the ways in which we are not humble but prideful that are hurting the very life of our family, our community and our church.

Jesus says: "*Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.*" Can we not also be gentle and humble of heart with each other and with Jesus from day to day? *Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto Thine.*