

Homily of Twenty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

The second reading contrasts the Jewish Old Testament religion and the New Covenant religion. The leaders of the Old Testament religion were proud and self-righteous Chief priests, Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees, and Lawyers. The leader and mediator of the New Covenant religion is Jesus Christ who is meek and humble of heart. The first reading and the Gospel are invitations to us to imitate the humility of Jesus Christ.

First reading: "My child, conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gift. Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find favor with God. What is too sublime for you, seek not, into things beyond your strength search not."

Gospel: "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline at table of honor... For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

It is not a coincidence that the words humble and human are closely related. The word humble comes from the Latin word *humus* or earth. Biology teaches us that *humus* is the best part of the soil that makes plants grow. God made human beings from *humus*, the best part of the soil. And human beings return to *humus* at the end of their life span. God says to us in Genesis 3:19, "For you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Humility can be defined as lack of pride or lack of vanity. That is why some spiritual fathers see humility as the foundation of all virtues. According to St. Augustine, "In a soul humility does not exist, there can be no true virtue, but mere appearance." St. Augustine also says, "If you are seeking perfection, there are three ways to reach it; first is humility, second is humility, and third is humility." Another saint, Thomas Villanova says, "Humility is the mother of many virtues. From it spring obedience, holy fear, reverence, patience, modesty, mildness, and peace." St. Thomas Villanova also says, "A humble person does not feel the insult which may be inflicted upon him or her."

We may put it this way, a humble person does not retain in himself or herself insults inflicted upon him or her. When we experience prolonged anger or disturbance of soul, mind and body due to insults from someone, it means that the pride in us or our self-importance has retained the insults. The less proud we are or the less self-important we feel, the less we are wounded by insults, and the more forgiving we are. At the root of many un-forgiveness, misunderstandings and arguments is wounded pride or wounded self-importance. Scripture says, "Where there is strife, there is pride; but wisdom is found in those who take advice" (Proverbs 13:10).

A humble person is content and detached, and does not engage in unhealthy competitions and comparisons. He or she is respectful and not arrogant. He or she does not depend on human recognition. Jesus did not depend on human testimony (John 5:34). He admonishes us, "Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart" (Matthew 11:29). He teaches us humility when he washed the feet of his disciples. He said to them and to us, "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (John 13:12-15). This is excellent humility!

St. Paul encourages us to "Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him..." (Philippians 2:5-9).

A few more Bible passages for our reflection and prayer:

Proverbs 8:13, "The Lord says, 'I hate pride and arrogance, and perverse speech.'"

Proverbs 11:12, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom."

Proverbs 29:23, "Pride brings a person low, but the lowly in spirit gains honor."

Luke 1:52-53, "He has brought down rulers from their thrones and has lifted the humble."

James 4:10, Humble yourself before the Lord and he will lift you up."

Remember the piece of advice in the first reading, "What is too sublime for you, seek not, into things beyond your strength search not." Many people have perished and many more are perishing because this advice is not heeded.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP