

## 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday (C)

- In our contemporary culture of high achievement & anxious, ambitious getting ahead, humility is not very popular.
- And yet, humility is certainly one of the most important of the Christian virtues, even while it is probably one of the most misunderstood.
- Humility is not something weak & negative.
- It is not some abject sense of being useless & worthless, of being nothing more than a sinner deserving only of condemnation & punishment.
- But rather, humility is something strong & powerful & positive.
- True humility does not cause us to hang our heads, but rather to be unafraid, because humility is simply accepting the truth.
- It is simply recognizing reality as it actually is & the truth of who we are.
- And that reality is that we are completely & continuously dependent on God, but on a God who freely & gratuitously gives of God's goodness.
- One of the best examples of this true humility is when we celebrate it in every eucharist when we say just before communion (old trans.): "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word & I shall be healed."
- And God says the word, & that word heals us & makes us worthy.
- Therefore, the actual reality is that we are worthy with the worth that God gives us – he sees the true value of each of us.
- In this sense, humility is liberating & this is certainly cause for positive celebration & thanksgiving instead of negative groveling in debilitating guilt.
- But we don't really believe this because we think we need to put forward a mask of ourselves before others in order to be considered as valuable.
- Humility tells us that we do not earn anything from God or gain anything ourselves by practicing religion & performing good & meritorious acts.
- Humility tells us that it is all a completely free gift of God, given to us entirely on God's own initiative, with absolutely no claim or merit of our own.
- This is what the story in today's gospel deals with - about those who arrogantly take the places of honor at the table - they think that it is their right as a reward for all they have done in so diligently keeping the law.
- But, as opposed to this, humility tells us that we are like the beggar, the crippled, the lame, & the blind, who simply accept, as a completely unmerited gift, the place at the banquet to which God invites us.
- Humility also tells us that just as we have received without merit, so too we must give without repayment.
- This is the virtue we all struggle to obtain because it is the opposite of the fundamental flaw of human beings - pride.
- It's been the story of humanity since Adam & Eve decided that they really didn't need to have God in their lives.

- We can be continually thinking about ourselves, & the particular status we should have in our families, at work, at school, in the neighborhood, & we forget that we are nothing without God, & everything only because of God.
- True humility gives us the freedom that enables us to think of others prompts us to selfless service of others simply because it sees that same God-given worth & value in each person.
- All people are equal in God's sight, so the banquet Jesus refers to has implications for how we share the riches with which we have been blessed with others in the world.
- The poor, crippled, lame & blind of our world are the majority of God's children who mainly live in the Third World - they are our brothers & sisters.
- At the banquet of life Christians are called to give priority to the needs of these people, not only because they have a just claim on our resources, but also because they can't do anything for us in return.
- They purify our motives.
- When we link our concern, time, talent, career, & money with these children of God, we tame that nagging question, 'What's in it for me?' with a firm reply, 'Very little – except God's justice.'
- So instead of selfishly seeking our own good we seek the good of others - both in matters secular & spiritual.
- Jesus' message about humility is as relevant today as it was in the first century.
- It is part of human nature to want to fit in & to want to belong.
- Sometimes we are tempted to seek this acceptance at any cost but when our sense of belonging is achieved through the harming, humiliation or exploitation of others then the price is too high.
- When our desire for the latest fashion comes at the expense of others being able to simply live, then the price is too high.
- When we lift ourselves up by putting others down, then the price is too high.
- This is certainly what Scripture means when it says, "Conduct your affairs with humility ... humble yourself ... & then you will find favour with God."
- And this is why Jesus says, "All those who exalt themselves shall be humbled & those who humble themselves shall be exalted."