

22nd Sunday Ordinary Time

Great spiritual teachers in our Catholic tradition have taught about humility. Real humility is living in the truth of who we are before God and who we are in relationship to one another. The first reading today is from the Book of Sirach. The teaching is that humility will make a person loved, even more than giving gifts to others. The higher position that we have in the world, the deeper is our need for humility. Such humility will be shown in having an attentive ear. Humility is also known in the person who listens attentively to wisdom stories, to proverbs and to real life situations that help us understand others and respect them. Wisdom is not an intellectual activity. No, it is the gift of knowing how to live well in every situation while maintaining our deepest values. The psalmist tells us that God becomes the dwelling of the homeless, the liberty of prisoners, and refreshing rain for dry hearts. In his teaching Jesus invites us to think about how we think and act in relationship to others. Jesus invites us to think of ourselves as always the last and the least. *One day a sage came to a King for an interview. The sage had to wait for a long time because the King was very busy. Finally, the King said he could come in. When the sage entered the hall, the first thing he did was to take off his hat and bow to the King. Immediately the King took off his crown and bowed to the sage. The ministers and others who were around the King asked, "What are you doing? He took off his hat because he is an ordinary man. But you are the King. Why should you have to take off your crown?" The King said to his ministers, "You fools, do you think I wish to remain inferior to an ordinary man? He is humble and modest. His humility is a peerless virtue'. He showed his respect to me. If I did not take off my crown, then I would be showing less humility than an ordinary man, and I would be defeated by him.*

We are invited to think of ourselves as less than others. This has nothing to do with poor self image nor with psychological problems! Rather, this is an invitation to live in truth with others and to forge a new relationship with others by changing our way of thinking of them. Humility is not judging ourselves in comparison with others rather, it is evaluating ourselves to see how far we have used the talents and resources given to us by God to better the lives of others. Humility is not self abasement or humiliation. Humility is strength, abasement is weakness, and humiliation comes from outside. Humility is that inner strength that makes a husband to walk up to the wife after a quarrel and say, honey, am sorry. If we are not humble, we cannot acknowledge our wrong. If we are not humble, we will find it difficult even to approach a priest to make confession. A life without humility is a life of pride and pride is a twin sister to arrogance. *A proud and learned man makes a bet with an idiot. The learned man says, hey idiot, every question I ask that you don't know the answer, you have to give me £5. And if you ask me a question and I can't answer yours I will give you £5,000. The idiot agrees. The learned man asks: how many continents are there in the world? the idiot doesn't know and hands over £5. Now let me ask you, the idiot says: what animal stands with two legs but sleeps with three? The learned man tries and searches very hard for the answer but gives up and hands over £5,000. The learned man says dang it, I lost. By the way, what was the answer to your question? The idiot hands over £5.* Considering others better than yourself is the mark of a humble person. Gandhi said "The humble man is unconquerable". As we aspire for greatness practising humility will make our progress steady and fast. We have a call to be humble Christians after the example of Jesus Christ who humbled himself and became a man to die for us (Phil 2: 6-11). When we live a humble life God blesses and exalts us.