

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
(Sirach 3:17-18. 20. 28-29 / Luke 14:1. 7-14)
28.08.2022

Humility

Dear brothers and sisters,

The first reading we heard this morning ended with these words: “The heart of a sensible man will reflect on parables”. Then in the gospel passage Jesus told us a parable. What is a parable? A parable is a story which has a deeper meaning than appears on the surface; it evokes something other than its immediate content suggests. So, today’s gospel passage is not an ordinary straight forward teaching. Jesus does not want to speak simply about the choice of places at a wedding banquet. Jesus does not want to give us just some advice to help us avoid public embarrassment or obtain some honour for ourselves. So, what does Jesus want to speak to us about? It is the last line of our gospel text that tells us what he really wants to say here: “All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted”. Today’s gospel is an invitation to humble ourselves in order to be exalted.

How is it possible for us to receive this invitation to humble ourselves as good news? After all, humility does not receive good press today! Does it? Perhaps the way to receive Jesus’ call to humility is as a prophetic voice, a prophetic voice which seeks to create a breach in our way of thinking and acting, a breach through which true life can pass and so develop within us and among us.

It is true that humility does not get good press. The society in which we live and the culture in which we bathe do not encourage us to be humble. On the contrary, they invite us to think of ourselves first before thinking of others. Everything around us tells us that what is important is to be the first, the strongest, the richest; what counts is to impress or seduce others by our external appearance. We like to be the centre of attention, the centre of attraction in all our meetings! We think: if only the world could revolve around us! As soon as we accomplish something good, we want it to be public knowledge; we want it to be publicized on the web. To be on stage, standing on the highest step, this is our goal. Yes our society and our culture are far from inviting us to humble ourselves.

But let us not deceive ourselves: this mad course of action that has us run towards honours and recognition will lead us sooner or later not only to disrespect others, but also to depression, to a feeling of loneliness inside; we will be sickened by it to the point of despair. While we may have thought that we had found true life, in fact very soon we will experience a kind of death.

The way to true life and happiness – a happiness which leaves a good taste in the mouth- is humility. Why? Because Jesus himself was humble. “His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied himself even to accepting death on a cross”. And we know what happened: “God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names”. Jesus humbled himself and his Father exalted him. Such was his way; such is the way forward for us too, if we want to enjoy true life.

We are invited to humble ourselves in our relationship with God. We do so by always keeping in mind God's presence and God's blessings in our lives, being careful never to forget him. He is our Creator and Saviour, we are His creatures. True life and true happiness can come to us only as a gift from our Creator. We cannot give happiness to ourselves through our own efforts alone, through our achievements in life. Our humble and perseverant communion with God, our listening to his word and the memory of his blessings, this is the way to live life to the full and to experience true happiness.

We also have to humble ourselves in our relationships with others. Once again, let us look to Jesus. Let us look of Him in the upper room, where he washed his disciples' feet. We have to serve our brothers and sisters, and not to lord it over them. To serve our brethren means to help them to become who they truly are, to give our life for them, to give our time to them, "to be gentle with them in the midst of our business" to quote the sage heard in our first reading.

If we humble ourselves, the Lord will exalt us, and our brothers and sisters will confer honour upon us too; they will manifest their recognition to us, eventually confiding us responsibilities for the good of all. Once again, recognition and honours must be received from others, and ultimately from the Other par excellence. If we grasp at honours for ourselves, if we seek to give them to ourselves, even if we arrive at our end, we will not bear fruit and we will not be happy.

The point is not only to humble ourselves, to choose to be humble, but also to accept humiliations when they are imposed on us, even when they are inflicted unjustly. Here too, Jesus gives us an example. He suffered his unjust passion and death on the Cross, but his humiliation was to become for him the way to his resurrection. This is often the painful path which we simply cannot avoid. We shall get through it only if God is the most important reality in our lives. I would add that to receive humiliations and accept them is a powerful school for learning how to be humble.

Humility is the basic principle for right relationships in life. If we are not humble, we act as if we were a sort of God and life with us becomes unsafe for others, because even if we act like God, we are not God; we are not as merciful as he is; we are not as respectful of others as He is, and we can be a danger to others.

True humility awakens within us a sentiment of gratitude and respect for all our brothers and sisters. We come to see them as people who, like us, were created by God out of love. We are called to receive others as God's gifts to us, as signs of God's love for us. God speaks to us through them, if we listen to them carefully.

We have to make efforts to become humbler, but true humility is a grace we also have to ask for in prayer. We must receive it from God, patiently awaiting for the moment when it will please the Lord to grant us this gift.

A truly humble heart, a truly humble person ignores that he or she is humble. If we think that we are humble, pride is not far from us. A person of humble heart is a source of blessing for those who meet him. Humble people set others free, they bring them healing and peace, they comfort them by their presence and encourage them to continue their pilgrimage towards the kingdom.

Let us welcome the prophetic voice of Jesus calling us to be humble. We shall not be disappointed if we obey that call. Indeed we shall experience true peace and lasting joy. To be humble does not imply that we do not have to do our best in life, but that we do it not for our own glory but for the glory of God.