

## **Twenty Second Sunday of the Year: August 28, 2016**

Sirach 3:17-18.20.28-29; Hebrews 12:18-19.22-24a; Luke 14:1.7-14

As human persons we often aim to possess all power and control, to be the first in every possible situation, to remain at the top and have a lead over the others. For at times our humility has been crushed by pride and we are not able to forge ahead. Humility, the virtue recommended to us is a wise and saintly basic virtue of Christian life. It is the one virtue which our Lord told us to copy from him as he asks us to learn from him for he is meek and humble of heart. In the Gospel of today Jesus dines with religious leaders and takes the opportunity to teach some important qualities of discipleship particularly that of humility. Jesus recommends other virtues but tells us that humility is the foundation on which all other Christian virtues are built. He invites us to recognize our own lowliness before God and at the same time speaks to us of the importance of accepting the marginalized and the downtrodden persons. The rich and the powerful find it difficult to be humble before God. They rely too much on their own strength and security. In the first reading, a wise teacher is giving sound advice to his students that humility will bring them favour before the eyes of God. Humility means serving others rather than self. In the second reading we are reminded that we already have a foretaste of heaven in the community founded by Jesus. What we need as followers of Jesus is humbly to submit to the will of God in our lives, trusting in his goodness.

The First Reading from the Book of Sirach we have the words of wisdom of the saintly man who spent his life meditating on the law of God. His concern was to offer help to those truly interested in guiding their lives by the Law of Moses. He as a loving father, advises the people to live in humility remembering that they are the creatures of God. He teaches the people that if they perform their tasks with humility, they will be loved by those whom God accepts. The author defines humility as serving others rather than the individual self. It is the fundamental characteristic of the servant of God. The greater a person is, the more humble he should be and then he will find favour in the sight of the Lord. Humility is practiced by providing the opportunity for others to be heard. Humility is understood as a quality by which a person considers his own defects, has a humble opinion of self and willingly submits himself to God and to others for God's sake. It is a virtue by which a person having known himself truly humbles before God. The reading tells us the humble man knows that his human intellect is finite and must not probe into the infinite. He must have the humility to accept that God is all in all. Self-giving and generosity lead to advantages only God can grant.

Today's Second Reading from the Letter to the Hebrews advises us not to relapse into the old ways indicating the time prior to conversion. We are encouraged to persevere to the end of the path that leads us to our heavenly inheritance. The author wants to impress on the Jewish converts the superiority of the Christian religion over that of the Old Testament which they had practiced. He emphasizes that Jesus is the fulfillment of all OT hopes. To encourage the Christians he points out the rewards that await those who persevere in their living faith. Here the author identifies four factors that are associated with the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant was given to the people from a distance. It was given by someone else namely, Moses. It brought fear in the heart of the believers and it brought the anger of God. At Mount Sinai the people of God trembled at God's presence. It is even said that Moses who was a friend of God, trembled before him. Under the New Covenant, we enjoy the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The New Covenant is given to us by Jesus at the Last Supper. Jesus "is the mediator of a better Covenant, which has been enacted through better promises." The New Covenant brought peace and tranquility to us, thus leading us closer to the love of Jesus and the love of God. Hence we are encouraged to persevere in our living faith and humility so we may be humble as Jesus was humble.

Let us now reflect on the Gospel passage of today. On the Sabbath, Jesus went to eat at the home of one of the Pharisees who lived in that place where Jesus was proclaiming the Kingdom of God. Naturally, people watched him, especially the doctors of the Law, the religious teachers of the time. For Jesus had been in the habit of healing people on the Sabbath, which was something the doctors and the scribes could not tolerate. And, indeed, on that day Jesus healed a sick man, a man who had dropsy. This is described in a part of the Gospel we do not read today, but it is good to mention it in order to provide the context for this account. They observed Jesus, who had come to heal souls and bodies. For they wanted to know whether or not he would respect the Sabbath rest. But what can or cannot be done on the Sabbath day is not something that is to be decided by men, but rather by God, and God alone. For the Sabbath rest, which became the Sunday rest, was something that God himself established forever, since it is written in the Book of Genesis that on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.

Here Jesus takes advantage of sharing table fellowship with a leading Pharisee to teach some controversial teaching on humility. In a culture regulated by the social concepts of honour and shame, people strove to achieve honour and avoid shame.

Who you ate with, where you placed yourself at table, how you ate, all had important social significance. That meant that at a meal one should attempt to get a seat closest to the host which would be the most honourable place to be. The worst thing that could happen would be that you have to give up your seat of honour to another person having previously occupied and take a lesser place. Jesus no doubt watched people scramble for higher seats but he encouraged them to do just the opposite, to take the lowest place. This would make no sense to people. However if the host recognizes the worth of the person, he is sure to receive his rightful honour. Indeed little did people know how God deals with people and rewards them for their humility. Jesus during his life on earth was an example of humility. For Jesus, and for us who follow him, the feast mentioned here is, first of all, an image of the celestial banquet in which all the elect of God are invited to take part, in eternal happiness. But, secondly, it is a lesson concerning the attitude that we Christians must have as we live our lives in the world around us. This attitude must be one of humility and of renouncement of honors.

Again, the Gospel tells us that the Kingdom of God, the perfect society, which is the goal of the Christian message, is often pictured as a banquet. It is an occasion of sharing and joyfulness an opportunity of being together. There is plenty available for each individual and all have an equal share. There is enough and more for every single person's needs. Here Jesus was instructing his disciples as to the place the guests should occupy at the table when invited by someone. As a general rule in a fixed system, the most distinguished guest sits at the right hand of the host where he receives the highest honour. The second most important guest sits at the left side of the host, and so on. While Jesus was aware of this fixed system, he was not presenting a lesson in social etiquette. He used this example of good manners at the table to draw attention to how honour is accredited in the Kingdom of God. When Jesus points out that it is for the host to invite the guest to come and move to a higher position at the table, He was saying something else. The attendance of the guest at the table depends on an invitation from God. And the reward lies in the growing likeness of God Himself who tells the least worthy to come up higher.

Jesus' second message in today's Gospel reading is the advice to the host regarding who should be invited and that we should not invite to the table those that we know. By doing so, we only expect that we will be invited by them as their way of showing gratitude for having invited them. A lot of people have a problem with this teaching because it goes against a social tradition. Guests who are invited to a party feel obligated to invite the host in the near future to a party of their own. And if they do not hold a party or invite the host as expected, they are labeled as being heartless. He tells them to invite those who cannot repay them or invite them for a

similar meal. It happens that if an invited guest is poor and cannot afford to hold a party to which the host would be invited, he is labeled as being cheap. From that follows a classification system where the rich are associated with the rich and the poor being associating themselves with the poor. He tells the host to invite those who are poor, the cripple, the lame and the blind. In other words to invite people that have been marginalized and judged unfit to engage in acceptable social interaction. We must remember that in the Body of Christ, there are no distinctions. We should not be inviting someone to the table because he is rich, famous, educated or because we need a favour in return. We should be inviting them in the love of Christ so they may joyfully share in our meals and feasts. Those who do so will be repaid by the Lord God at the resurrection of the righteous.

This parable was intended in the first instance for the Pharisees but it has a lesson for all people. A proud follower of humble Christ is indeed a contradiction in terms. St Paul clearly tells us how Christ humbled himself even becoming a slave for our sake. He was born in a stable, grew up in an obscure village of Nazareth, earned his livelihood as an ordinary carpenter, did not have a house of his during his public life and finally died on the cross between two thieves and was buried in a borrowed grave. He could boldly say, learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart. In the Gospel of today it is Jesus who tells us that one who exalts himself will be humbled. He tells his followers that to be in his kingdom a person has to be humble like the master. This humility has to be in accordance with the dignity as the image of God. Jesus also applies this lesson on humility to the host telling him not to be calculating as to invite those who can reciprocate the invitation. His invitation has to be as how God does it, helping every one without any distinction of religion caste or status and in this way be worthy of the divine reward.

Yet the Gospel passage presents a challenge faced by Jesus. They had invited him for a meal on a Sabbath day and watched him closely whether he would be breaking the law and thus find some opportunity to accuse him. He had already given them the opportunity to accuse him of eating with the tax collectors and sinners. Here he seems to break another rule and a normal procedure by asking them to occupy the lower seats. Jesus here seems to be proposing that we rather try to work towards creating a circle society, a circle, there is no top or bottom. All within the circle are equal and all face each other. All are in a better position to know and respect each other. As we receive the Eucharistic meal we ask the grace to form such family of one heart and one mind. We must look forward to live according to words of Sirach, that humility helps us to be attentive to God's word and again he says that humility demands true strength of Character. Humility as a virtue gives a true estimate of self and gives us the insight to use the gifts for God's

glory. Humility also helps us to bow to the will of God and to surrender ourselves to him. It strips us of our pride and makes us recognize our place before him. Again humility invites us to be comfortable with and within ourselves. We have the example of Jesus who was humble throughout his earthly life and wants us to be humble like him. In the midst of the life's challenges our humility will help us to stand firm before God.

Let us remember that we are being watched, just as Jesus was. The majority of people, upon seeing a Christian choose the lowest place, will react by saying that we are insane and what we do is just for show. That would conclude that this would gain us nothing. Those who, on the contrary, are seized by the Spirit of God, will say of us that we are certainly wise and sensible persons. They will see the inner truth and goodness in it. We are all called to witness to our faith in Jesus the Son of God: this witness may seem insignificant to our eyes, like a mere drop of water in the ocean. However, the Holy Spirit is there, throughout the world, to draw from this drop of water a torrent of graces for the conversion of the entire world. God has given us everything we possess. There is nothing that we have that has not come from him. And all that God has given us, he has given it to us freely. God is our model, and we must try to be like him. So, let us do likewise, and the world will see in each one of us an image of God. Let us do like the Lord: let us give freely and spread the Word of God; doing so must be the first of all our charitable acts.

A young man and a young woman became engaged and were looking forward to a near wedding day, when the young man was suddenly called into the service of his country. From the field of warfare letters regularly came and went, and love shined brightly in all of them. Then letters from the young man abruptly stopped. A few weeks passed and then there came a letter in a strange handwriting. In it the young woman read: "There has been another battle. I have lost both my arms. I asked my comrade to write this for me, and to tell you that I release you from our engagement, for now I will not be able to work and support you." That letter was never answered. By the next train the young woman journeyed southward. She left the train and went directly to the hospital. Inquiring the location of the young man's cot, she quietly approached and suddenly flung herself down by the side of his cot with the passionate words, "I will never give you up. These hands of mine will work for you. We will live our life of love together."

"There was once a wise woman traveling in the mountains who found a precious stone in a stream. The next day she met another traveler who was hungry, and she opened her bag to share her food. The hungry traveler saw the precious stone and

asked if she might give it to him. She did so without hesitation. The traveler left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for a lifetime, but a few days later he came back to return the stone to the woman who had given it to him. 'I've been thinking,' he said, "I know how valuable the stone is, but I'm giving it back in the hope that you can give me something much more precious. I want you to give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me the stone.' ""The more you share... The more you grow..."

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