

Sunday August 28, 2022  
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

## Parishioner Reflection

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Humility: The Unpopular Virtue

There is no merit in being lowly in the eyes of society and the lowly, the needy, the weak and the vulnerable are often looked upon with contempt in our contemporary culture. North American and European society are extremely focused on success, merit and the accomplishments that can be listed on a resumé. Indeed, many of us place our self-worth in the merits and accomplishments we have achieved over the course of our lives and hence, all the expressions society has accumulated to describe the successful life: the self-made millionaire, the power broker or the gifted entrepreneur. These successful individuals are viewed as rich, powerful, often self-taught, self-reliant, and independent. They do not need anybody. Gospel values are quite the opposite: the weak, the lowly and the God-reliant are to be praised.

The scriptures today present us with the virtue of humility. Sirach instructs us to “perform our tasks with humility.” (Sirach 3:17) But what is this virtue? If we confine ourselves to today’s Gospel, we should seek the lowest place when going to a banquet and invite the destitute to our homes if we decide to throw a banquet ourselves. In order to really understand humility, we must interpret today’s readings through the lens of other passages in the Scriptures, like the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (. 8:1-2) The poor in spirit and those who mourn are not self-reliant, they are the *anawim*; those who must rely on God and God’s strength because they trust not their own. Life has not broken the spirit of the *anawim* because they are full of hope. The difference is that their hope is not in their accomplishments, their accumulation of wealth, or the merits of their actions over the course of their lives. Even their own natural gifts of intelligence, artistic ability or beauty have no relevance to them because they do not focus on themselves at all—they focus on the Lord. They see the Lord’s goodness as the only thing worth relying on because God, being infinite and eternal, is the most trustworthy person upon whom to place one’s hope, faith and most importantly, love. The humble person does not say, I am such a lowly and useless person. Indeed, the humble person does not think much of her or himself at all.

God is the focus of the humble person. There is no sense of self-importance because he or she knows that compared to God, we are nothing and have accomplished nothing. The things that society and the world holds as important are ephemeral while the goods and gifts of God are everlasting. Humble persons do not have self-loathing but genuine self-knowledge—a knowledge that recognizes all our limitations, weaknesses, and sinfulness as well as our God given strengths, talents, and virtues. Humility allows us to see ourselves as God sees us: like the secrets Sirach mentions in verse 19. It also empowers us to truly love our neighbour

because it stamps out competition, gossip, back-biting and jealousy. When we know ourselves and see ourselves as God sees us, we also know that we are loved as a precious child. In Peter Van Breemen's seminal work, *As Bread That is Broken*, the author calls this knowledge as a recognition that God's love is the "deepest ground of our being." Nothing can compare to this love and the recognition that God loves me for me is transformative. There is no magic to acquiring humility. It is a journey that takes a lifetime because one cannot, except by a special gift of grace (like the of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus), know God's love for us except through self-knowledge and a lifetime of relationship with Him. Socrates said that self-knowledge is the beginning of wisdom, and I would add it is the beginning of humility. God's grace will help us to do the rest, if we open the door to the One who is knocking.

So, we thank God for the daily trials that reveal to us our pettiness, selfishness and pride. We receive all life's difficulties as grace filled moments meant to deepen our self-knowledge and humble us through the humiliation of seeing our failures, weaknesses and incapacity to love God and neighbour. Indeed, we embrace all of them as if each revelation was given to us by God's loving hand. With time, patience and an attentive heart, the Lord shows us that He loves us in spite of all these faults and failings, and He lifts us up to eat at His banquet table. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,

"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. 1Pet. 5:5-7