

Twenty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time C - Conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved... Humble yourself... and you will find favor with God.

August 28, 2022.

Christ is a King. One of the most important laws in Christ's Kingdom is the law of humility. ***This law says that "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be exalted"***. In other words, greatness in his Kingdom comes not from outdoing other people but serving other people, helping them advance, and keeping oneself in the background. A good example is St. John the Baptist who said, ***"He must increase, I must decrease"***. Another one is Mother Mary who said, ***"I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word."***

In his very first sermon, Jesus had taught the same law with different words: ***"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."*** (Luke 6:21). It's the same law stated so directly in the First Reading (Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29): ***"conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved... Humble yourself... and you will find favour with God."*** This law goes directly against everything this fallen world teaches us. It's extremely hard for us to swallow, which is why Jesus used the unambiguous parable (Luke 14:1, 7-14). But even the parable wasn't enough. This law is so fundamental, that Jesus also taught it to us by living it out in an extreme way: through his passion and death. Jesus, the Lord of heaven, came to earth and purposefully took the lowest place possible - that of a condemned criminal on the most humiliating form of death - crucifixion. He allowed himself to be stripped of every honour with his reputation being dragged through the mud by the lies and corruption of his enemies. And yet, because he humbled himself so thoroughly, he has been glorified so magnificently. Such is the law of his Kingdom.

The Law of Humility doesn't mean that we should sit around and do nothing, it simply means that we should remember that God is God and we are not, and we have to depend on him. After the construction of the Titanic, a reporter asked the builder how safe the ship would be. "Not even God can sink it," he answered. Well, God didn't have to sink it; an iceberg was sufficient. Jesus taught us that to enter his Kingdom we have to become like children. **Children know that they are dependent on their parents for food, shelter, and everything else, so it's natural for them to accept being dependent on God as well. But it's not a sad, pessimistic dependence. True humility is joyful, because it opens the door to a real relationship with God, something arrogant self-sufficiency doesn't allow.** At a Catholic summer Bible camp, a seven-year-old won the silver medal in the mini-soccer competition. He was so happy that he wore it around his neck all the time. On the last day of the camp this boy left one of the counsellors a note regarding leaving his medal in the chapel. The counsellor went to the chapel but couldn't find it. When the campers had gone home and the counsellors were taking one last look around to gather up any left over items, the same counsellor went back into the chapel and found the medal somewhere he would never have thought to look: it was on the crucifix. The boy had stacked up three chairs so that he could reach high enough and put it around Christ's neck. This boy surely knows how to give credit to the Giver of all good things. Who was the happier person, the little boy or the man who built the Titanic? When we have talents, let's point others to God who gives them to us to serve others and for the good of the community. Remember we are all vessels of clay. On our own we are worthless but God took hold of our worthless dust and gave it eternal value by turning it into his own image and likeness.

The Law of Humility is written not only in the Gospel, but even in nature, God's creation. Consider the tallest and most fruitful trees that stand firm in spite of storms, wind, and earthquakes? What gives them the vitality to bear fruit year after year, spreading their own goodness to all living things around them? Their roots. Without deep, strong roots, the tree would crash to the ground in the first summer storm. Without wide, expansive roots, they couldn't absorb the nourishment and moisture necessary for putting out leaves, buds, flowers, and fruit. But these all-important roots are completely hidden. They really are in the "lowest place", where no one pays

any attention to them. **Without the root of humility, our lives cannot bear the fruit of authentic happiness for ourselves and those around us.** Consider also the mountains and the valleys. The majestic mountaintops pierce the brilliant sky with their jagged peaks. Impressive, visible from a distance, awe-inspiring - but also barren. The higher up you go on the mountain, the less life you find. The valleys beneath the mountaintops are hidden. You can't see them from far away. They draw no attention to themselves. In this lowest place they receive the fresh water that flows down the mountainside from the melting ice on top, water full of nutrients from the eroding soil. So the valleys overflow with life - flowers, grass, trees, animals, streams, birds, and fish. When we exalt ourselves we become impressive to others but barren of life, like mountaintops. **When we humble ourselves, as Christ did, our lives become fruitful and vibrant, both here on earth and for all eternity in heaven.**

Humility also frees us to maximize our God-given talents, because it frees us from being afraid of what other people will think. The history of art and music is full of examples of this. **The true artists worked hard to develop their creative gifts, regardless of the praise or recognition of critics.** Many great works in the classical music repertoire, for example, were never even recognized until long after the composer's death. Bach's great Mass in B Minor, one of the most magnificent musical settings for the Mass of all time, was never even performed during his lifetime. Bach was a Protestant, but since the Mass was Catholic, the work was not permitted to be played in his Protestant church. But the music of that Mass required a small orchestra, and at that time, using orchestras was forbidden in Catholic churches. Beethoven had a similar experience. In his lifetime the modern piano was not developed. The first great works to become the staple of serious public piano performances were his thirty-two piano sonatas. But only two of these were actually played in concert during Beethoven's lifetime. If Bach and Beethoven had focused their efforts on getting "the place of honour" in the public eye instead of focusing on being true to their calling, these immortal works of art would never have come into existence. **Pride cuts us off from reality and makes us prisoners of ourselves. Humility, on the other hand, doesn't stifle the human spirit, but sets it free.**

Brothers and sisters, **following the law of humility leads to interior peace, joy, wisdom, and a greater share in God's glory. That's what Christ wants for us: the more we grow in humility, the more we will experience those things.** Our parish patron St. Paul's mindset was humility, giving up privilege to be a servant like Jesus, putting himself in positions where his service for Christ might even cost him his life. Paul was willing to do that because he was confident of the eternal life that Jesus came to make available for us all. Jesus wants us to seek true greatness, lasting achievements, and everlasting glory - and he says that to do so we have to learn humility. But what does humility look like? The First Reading tells us three faces of humility. **First, humility admits that it doesn't know everything:** "*What is too sublime for you, seek not.*" When was the last time we admitted that we didn't know the answer to a question or a problem? Our fallen nature tends to act like a know-it-all. But that only creates tension and anxiety. This week, **let's not be afraid to admit that we don't know it all.** **Second, humility doesn't insist on doing things its own way - it stays open to other people's advice and ideas:** "*An attentive ear is the joy of the wise.*" Our fallen nature tends to be bull-headed - we want our own way, or else! But that creates even more tension than the know-it-alls! This week, **let's have "an attentive ear", so we can experience the "joy of the wise."** **Third, humility serves others instead of demanding to be served: "alms atone for sins."** When we give alms, when we give our time, talents, and treasures to help those in need, we reverse the curse of sin that plagues us and our world. Jesus asks us to imitate his humility. As **St. Padre Pio said, "As gifts increase in you, let your humility grow, for you must consider that everything is given to you on loan."** Humble Christians are more active, courageous and adventurous than arrogant ones, because they know that they have nothing to lose - their life is completely in God's hands. Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Pope St. John Paul II were both extremely humble, and yet they were full of life, vigour, creativity, and joy. Humility does not mean having low self-esteem or being bored. Humility is about living life to the full, by stepping off the dark throne of arrogance and into the bright

throne-room of Christ the King. Yes, doing all three at once is overwhelming. Jesus is realistic - he knows what we're made of. Let's ask him which of these three faces of humility he wants us to work on this week. If we ask him, I am sure he'll tell us - after all, **he wants what's best for us even more than we do.** Amen.