

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, September 1, 2019

Your Place At the Table

Written by Tracy Earl Welliver, MTS

Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29

Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a

Luke 14:1, 7-14



Humility is a virtue that has become misunderstood and somewhat trampled upon in modern culture. Some in our society tend to label a lack of humility as confidence. Others see any hint of bravado or pride in one's abilities as distasteful or pompous. The extreme positions can easily encourage people to gravitate to a position of feeling less than or more than others around them. Neither position is healthy, and God does not call us to either form of humility. God calls us to a humility where we understand that who we are and what we have is a blessing from Him and that He is God and we are not.

There is a theme one can notice in some Evangelical and Catholic circles of seeing ourselves as so lowly that we have little value outside of God. This denies the fact that God created us in His image and in a fearful and wonderful manner. The value of every human life is profound, and there is intrinsic value in all of us. For those who seek to follow Christ, we have also been made new creations in Him through our baptism. Yes, we are imperfect and subject to sin, but that sin is never greater than the grace of God.

In the third chapter of Sirach, the prophet states, "Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find favor with God." These words do not suggest we are to see ourselves as nobodies, but instead challenges us to see that true favor does not lie in earthly greatness, but instead with the favor of God. We are who we are because of God. Throughout Scripture, we do not find the premise that we are all equally blessed. However, like in Jesus' parable of the talents, God's favor lies in what we do with what we have been given. In fact, as Sirach points out, those who have been given more — and find themselves with greater status because of it — need even greater humility.

When Jesus is speaking at the dinner of a Pharisee in Luke 14, he addresses the issue of those who are nearly void of humility. Here the issue is not seeing one's self as worthless, but instead seeing one's self as exalted above all others. Jesus watched as those present at a dinner party jockeyed for positions at the table. He begins explaining to them the need to be careful with where one sits because someone else of greater status may make them move, and that could be a source of great embarrassment. Before Jesus completes his lesson for those present, he suggests that future dinner parties should not include only those who jockey for status, but the true guests of honor should include those who have no means of paying back the favor: the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. These are the ones who God favors for they have no earthly status. For them, humility is a natural byproduct of their position in life. For those who are currently at the party, humility is a virtue they must learn and cultivate in their lives.

I am reminded of a man of advanced years I encountered many years ago. He explained that he had spent his entire life trying to be humble. For him, that meant he was nothing special. However, now in his later years, he realized that his thinking was wrong. Humility did not mean that he had no real value, but instead should have meant he was to offer gratitude to God for making him a wonderfully unique human being and that the pathway to profoundly honoring God was to use what he had been given in life for God's glory. A common social media quote says, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less." We would do well to add, "and think of God more."

In this life, we are not to hold our heads down in false humility. We are sons and daughters of a king. We are members of a royal priesthood. We have been created uniquely and been given many gifts so we may honor that king. However, it is when we forget that all we are and will be is tied to the One who created us, we place ourselves into the position of becoming our own god. We become like those at the dinner party, comparing ourselves to others and strategizing how to rise higher in standing.

When we are considering where we stand in this world, perhaps we would do well to heed the words of many parents: "Be sure to choose your friends wisely." We can spend time with those who bring us down and make us feel worthless. We can spend time with those who prop us up and inflate our egos, making

us in greater need of humility. Or we can spend time with "the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame." God has already chosen to offer them the seat of honor at the table. It would seem prudent for all of us to spend more of our time in such good company.

Tracy Earl Welliver, MTS

PRAYER

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,
that I love only what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,
to defend all that is holy.

Guard me so, O Holy Spirit,
that I may always be holy.

Amen.

— *St. Augustine's Prayer to the Holy Spirit*