

Homily 22nd Sunday in Ordinary time; year C

The story is told about a bus driver who was offered a handful of peanuts by an old lady seated at the choice seat behind him. He gratefully accepts and munches on them. Soon after, the old lady gives him another handful of peanuts. The third time she does this, the driver finally asks her why she keeps giving him peanuts. The lady's reply: "That's because I have no teeth, and I just love the chocolates around them."

In today's Gospel Jesus teaches His disciples about humility and generosity. When we do not take the "choice seats," but take the lowest place, we learn to be humble. When we give not only the peanuts and excesses in our lives, but give freely with no thought of payback, we learn to be truly generous and giving.

A lot of our problems and troubles could have been avoided if we learned to be humble to God and to others. When we sin, we disobey God's will because of our pride, believing that we can do without Him. When we are proud, we cut our dependence on and need for God. The road back toward God's heart is humility. Unless and until we take this road, we will not have true peace.

A lot of our problems and troubles can be healed only with humility. When we accept our failures in humility, reach out to God and to others in humility, forgive others in humility and forgive even ourselves in humility, then we are healed and we are free.

One of the parishioners of St. Augustine asked him this question: “Father, what are the most important things in religion?”

“The most important things in religion? I should reply, the first is humility, the second is humility and the third is humility,” answered St. Augustine.

There was a boy who was very popular among others his age. He was an excellent leader in his school groups. One of his friends visited him and saw a homemade plaque in his room with the words “I Am Third” on it. His friend asked him what it meant and he replied, “It is the motto I try to use in my life. It means “God is first, others are second, and I am Third.””

The driving force in our lives should be trying to please God. Secondly, we should take into consideration the needs and of others.

Christian Herter was the governor of Massachusetts in the 1950's the story is told of a time when he was campaigning, when he came across someone whom he was about to ignore, but found himself having to notice. Apparently, he was having a really hard day campaigning, missed his lunch and came in the late afternoon to a church barbeque, really hungry. As he moved down the serving line, the story goes, he held out his plate to the woman serving chicken. She put a piece on his plate and turned to the next person in line.

“Excuse me,” the governor said. “Do you mind if I have another piece of chicken?” “Sorry,” the woman told him. “I’m supposed to give one piece of chicken to each person.” “But I’m starved,” the governor said. “Sorry,” the woman said again, “Only one to a customer.”

Governor Herter was apparently a modest and unassuming man but he decided this time he would throw a little weight around. “Do you know who I am?” he said to this woman. “I’m the governor of the state.” “Do you know who I am?” the woman replied. “I’m the lady in charge of the chicken. Move along mister,” she said.

Sometimes we don’t notice “the lady in charge of the chicken” or the waiter at the table, or the person in the kitchen, or the clerk at the counter, or as Jesus points out, the poor or the crippled or the lame or the blind or the homebound or the illiterate, those who are out of sight, who hide as much as they can their problem, who fade away from our recognition.

Lastly, the humble person leads, and does so by serving quietly. Gets on with what needs to be done, to touch and influence for good, the lives of others. There they were. Jesus about to go to the cross and the disciples are trying to decide who among them is the greatest, and Jesus quietly tells them that he is their leader and he demonstrates leadership as one who serves.