

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C  
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Mary, Queen of Peace Catholic Church  
Sammamish, Washington  
28 August 2022

Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29  
Psalm 68  
Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a  
(Matthew 11:29ab) Luke 14:1, 7-14

### *Humility*

Beginning with the last Sunday of June (the Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time), we entered into a long section of the Gospel of Luke known as Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> Jesus has completed His ministry in Galilee, and now He turns towards completing the work of our salvation, which will occur in Jerusalem. That is, on the Cross at Calvary. It's the place of His Death, but also the place of His Victory over sin and death, which is revealed three days later with His Resurrection on Easter Sunday, followed seven weeks later by His Ascension to Heaven.

Along His Journey to Jerusalem, Jesus is teaching His disciples, revealing to them His Wisdom, and preparing them to be—not only witnesses of His Passion—but also witnesses of His Resurrection. Preparing them to be sent out to share His Wisdom and the Good News of forgiveness of sins and resurrection from the dead. It's a Wisdom that the world doesn't understand and actually rejects. Yet blessed are we to have heard the Good News and to have the opportunity to share it with others! And, in order to share it with others, we must personally continue to grow in the wisdom of the Cross.

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Two weeks ago, I preached about my experience of working at solving a Rubik's Cube with my nephew. I shared with you that working on the Cube over and over again—persevering at starting back at step one each time we made a mistake—helped us begin to understand the logic—or the wisdom—of the Cube. Through that repetition, we were being transformed from a

mere set of hands blindly following instructions on a page, to people who were understanding *why* the instructions had to be followed a certain way in order to reach our goal of solving the Cube. That's exactly what it means to be a disciple. A disciple is one who has learned and continues to learn.

Our life as disciples of Jesus Christ is meant to be the same. We're meant to keep on learning from the life of Jesus and putting it into practice in our own life. Not just blindly following instructions on a page or in a book. But becoming better and better at understanding *why* those instructions (we could also call them the Commandments, the parables, the teachings of the Church, etc.) are written the way they are written. *Why* things don't work so well when we ignore them, cut corners on them, or flat out disregard them as out of date, not applying to me, or changeable.

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Following along throughout this summer and into the fall as Jesus makes His Journey to Jerusalem gives us many opportunities to continue learning and deepening the wisdom of Jesus Christ and the Cross within us. To make them more and more habits of our thoughts, words, and actions. Another word for the holy habits of a disciple of Jesus Christ is virtues. Throughout Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem, He has many encounters with all kinds of people, in which He passes onto them the wisdom of the virtues, and how and why they are opposed to sin (or vices, which are sinful habits).

For example, six weeks ago Jesus visited the home of Martha and Mary. That Sunday, we had the opportunity to reflect on how even our gifts (such as Martha's gift of hospitality and service) when not rooted in Jesus, can be distorted by the enemy spirits. Which caused Martha to act out of envy and anger, complaining about her sister.

Four weeks ago, the sin of greed was the focal point of the Readings, as Jesus was called on to be an arbitrator between two brothers contesting their inheritance. Jesus taught us with these words: “Take care to guard against all greed...[and be] rich in what matters to God.”

Three weeks ago, the sin of sloth: “be vigilant...and prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.”

Today’s First Reading from Sirach and the Gospel both focus on the virtue of *humility*. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus uses the occasion of a fancy dinner party to teach us about this most important virtue. Humility is commonly regarded as the virtue that opposes the deadly sin of pride. It is that but, as we reflect upon pride, we see that it oftentimes brings along with it all the deadly sins: anger, envy, greed, and sloth (the ones we just mentioned), as well as lust and gluttony.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, we often see that humility is considered the foundation of all virtues, since the absence of humility would make any appearance of a virtue merely a façade.

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So, what is humility? One definition offered by the *Catechism*: the “virtue by which a Christian acknowledges that God is the author of all good. Humility avoids inordinate ambition or pride, and provides the foundation for turning to God in prayer.”<sup>3</sup> So, we see that humility has something very much to do with remembering and relating to God. It’s when we don’t remember or relate to God that we can get into trouble, and are tempted and vulnerable to the sin of pride.

Another way to put it:

“Humility is the virtue that recognizes our 100% reliance on God for all that we have, or ever will have. Everything on earth is on loan from God, including our good looks, our money, our house, etc. Those who think that they got all of these things on their own are in for a big surprise upon death. The devil fools some of us into thinking that we got these things due to our hard work, or our talent, or whatever, when in fact, God gave them all to us. Pride is the devil’s great sin, and

he wants us all to think that we are gods too, like he does. But by being humble, we beat him every time, because humility comes from the heart, and the devil does not have a heart. In Christianity, the bible says that the first shall be last, and the last shall be first. God humbles the proud and exalts the humble, says the bible, so get exalted! Be humble!”<sup>4</sup>

In today’s Gospel—it’s maybe a fancy dinner party—but it’s a fairly down-to-earth example of a dinner party to help us learn the wisdom of humility. In this setting, He was speaking to “the invited”, so we can sense there’s already a temptation for those listening to Him to feel elite or entitled; that they’ve earned their position. And what does the devil do with that temptation? He pushes it further, as Jesus notices them choosing places of honor at the table—clamoring and perhaps feeling pressure to get as much as they can out of this opportunity.

It doesn’t have to be a dinner party, we can apply this lesson to any setting of our life: the workplace, school, sports fields, playgrounds, church, the roads we drive on, parking lots. When we enter one of these settings, what is my first thought? To get what I can? To compete with others? To look at what others have? To wonder if I’m being denied something? You see how this type of pride can make us vulnerable to all kinds of other deadly sins.

The wisdom of humility encourages us to resist this temptation. To allow ourselves to be in a mode of receiving, a mode of gratitude, rather than a mode of taking. That’s the wisdom of humility.

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Two weeks ago, we heard in the Letter to the Hebrews about the cloud of witnesses. First and foremost, we learn Wisdom from Jesus. However, the saints who have gone before us, are those who have learned this Wisdom well. They are our friends and helpers. They are alive in Christ, and they are especially present to us as we celebrate this Mass.

We can learn so much wisdom from the example of the saints. That’s why it’s so important to find the saints that speak to you personally. Whether it’s a patron of your name,

your country, your birthdate, your profession or hobby. Finding saints to be your friends and to inspire you with wisdom of the virtues is helpful in our own growth in holiness.

One potential future saint who has inspired me is Father Walter Ciszek, an American Jesuit priest who was arrested in the Soviet Union during World War II. Accused of being a Vatican spy, he was imprisoned for over twenty years in Soviet labor camps. Presumed dead by his community, it was a big surprise when he was released and came back to the United States in 1963.

He wrote two memoirs of his experience, the first called *With God in Russia*, and the second called *He Leadeth Me*. The second memoir is a beautiful sharing of the spiritual wisdom that he received from God through his experience as a prisoner.

My favorite chapter in this book is towards the end, titled: “Humility”. The whole chapter is an exposition on the logic and wisdom of humility. I wish I had time to read the whole chapter for you, but I’ll conclude by sharing these excerpts of Fr. Ciszek’s wisdom of humility:

It is only natural to resent humiliation. We recoil from humiliating experiences because they are an affront to the dignity of our persons—which is another way of saying that our pride is hurt. That is the key to the problem, and it is then that we do well to recall who we really are and who God is. If we see nothing beyond the experience except the hurt and the unpleasantness, it can only be because we have lost sight, for the moment at least, of God’s will and his providence.<sup>5</sup>

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But unfortunately those who have lost a true sense of humility—that constant realization of the relationship between each individual and God—have also lost thereby the ability to look upon their burdens in this way. They see instead only the burden, the difficulties, the humiliation; and they become depressed.<sup>6</sup>

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How can all of this happen so suddenly, seemingly in so short a period of time? The answer lies in a loss of the vision of life as significant in God’s sight, a loss of the vision that sees all things as coming from the hand of God.<sup>7</sup>

...

No matter how badly the humble man fails, he will reckon his accounts with God and start over again, for his humility tells him of his total dependence on God.

In this lies the difference between the truly humble person and one who lacks humility. The former sees the blame in himself for the disorders of his life, for his failures and his faults, and he strives to recapture again a sense of dedication to God's will. The latter, far from blaming himself for any faults or failings, tries to justify his actions in some way or other and persists in doing exactly those things that are slowly alienating him from God.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 9:51-19:27 (Thirteenth through Thirty-first Sundays in Ordinary Time)

<sup>2</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 1866: "Vices can be classified according to the virtues they oppose, or also be linked to the capital sins which Christian experience has distinguished, following St. John Cassian and St. Gregory the Great. They are called 'capital' because they engender other sins, other vices. They are pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth or acedia."

<sup>3</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church Glossary*

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.catholicbible101.com/thevirtues.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Fr. Walter Ciszek, SJ, *He Leadeth Me* (1995), 174

<sup>6</sup> Ciszek, 175

<sup>7</sup> Ciszek, 176

<sup>8</sup> Ciszek, 176