

11th Sunday after Trinity
Sirach 3:17-20, 28-29
Heb 12:18-19, 22-24
Lk 14:1, 7-14

Today's readings are about humility. The Book of Sirach says that humility is required for harmonious relationships in a family or community to exist. The author stresses that humble attention should be paid to what God has revealed, and God's people must remember that God accepts the worship of the humble. Humility requires that there must be no lording it over others, especially those who are in need. This is because honour in the eyes of others is usually achieved at someone else's expense.

The emptiness of honour is the focus of today's gospel reading of Jesus telling a parable to those he saw picking the best seats at a dinner table. He turns the normal understanding of good manners into a religious lesson that the Pharisees needed to hear. Often in the secular world, honour and social recognition eludes those who demand it. The comment, "Don't you know who I am?", and the actions of those who are self-centred pompous show-ponies, are often treated with disdain. True dignity is always unconscious dignity and true honour is unexpected.

In telling this parable, Jesus was teaching the Pharisees an important lesson. It is common for humans to make friends with those who share a common interest or social sub-set, but the Pharisees had adopted this same tendency in the spiritual realm. They had refused all social contact with those who did not share their standards of piety. Whatever earthly rewards they achieved by this, they would miss out on the heavenly blessings showered on those who show kindness to those who cannot repay them.

We must not assume that the only way to heaven is what we believe and the way we worship. "My way or the Highway," is as dangerous an attitude in the spiritual realm as in the secular realm. Perfect love is entirely selfless, and as the Epistle to the Hebrews points out, it is the standard of God's Kingdom. The good news is that we can strive to be perfect lovers in the here and now and so sample a foretaste of heavenly relationships.

Humility in the secular and spiritual life is essential for serious Christians who are trying to become Christ-like. Dictionaries define humility as having an accurate opinion of oneself and expressing oneself moderately. In Charles Dickens' novel, 'David Copperfield', the obnoxious Uriah Heep constantly told people, "I'm ever so 'umble," when in fact he used his so-called humility to hide his ambitious and manipulative nature.

Bishop Anthony Bloom, an Orthodox bishop, wrote in his book, 'Beginning to Pray,'

"The word 'humility' comes from the Latin word 'humus,' which means fertile ground...Humility is the situation of the earth. The earth is always there, taken for granted, always trodden on by everyone, somewhere we cast and pour out all our refuse, all we don't need. It's there, silent and accepting everything and in a miraculous way making out of all the refuse new richness in spite of decay, transforming

putrefaction itself into a power of life and a new possibility of creativeness, open to sunshine, open to rain, ready to receive any seed we sow and capable of bringing thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold out of every seed.”

We often say that “Prayer changes things,” but when CS Lewis’ wife Joy was dying, and prayer did not change her condition, he said, “Prayer may not change Joy’s condition, but it changes me. Our prayer should be, that prayer will change us as we learn to embrace our weaknesses in which God’s power is visible by making us humble. We must pray to become like the dirt and soil of the earth; to be an ordinary, unobtrusive person where the pain and poison of this broken world and its people silently fall, are absorbed, and miraculously transformed into new life for others and oneself.”

In short, a truly humble person is the one who receives whatever the world throws at them and transforms it into new life.

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