

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2019

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of the virtue of humility. They show that humility helps find favor with God and build relationships with our fellows. They invite us to focus on the building of our relationships on humility.

The first reading describes the outcome of the life of the one who conducts his affairs with humility. It shows that the one who does so is loved by his fellows and finds favor with God. It also invites us to live without pretense and excessive pride.

This text allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the importance of humility. In fact, the Gospel starts with the invitation given to Jesus to dine in the house of one of the leading Pharisees.

Then, it talks about a parable Jesus gave as he realized that many of the invited guests were rushing to the place of honor. It reports in particular the speech of Jesus to the guests so that by keeping low-keyed in the receptions they might be elevated by the host and esteemed by the companions at table.

After that, the Gospel reports the words of Jesus to the host in which he declares that it is better to give dinner to the needy than to the wealthy people who can repay us. The Gospel ends with Jesus revealing that by giving to the needy, these will repay us at the day of the resurrection of the righteous.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about the virtue of humility. First of all, let me start with an observation. In fact, there is in each one of us an innate feeling that leads to value ourselves and the things we do.

That feeling is so strong that anytime that we are hurt or humiliated we come out of ourselves, we vindicate our rights and dignity, we defend ourselves, we do not want to shy away at any cost.

That feeling can easily be recognized in the natural pride that we all have. That pride is important and something good because it is the foundation of our self-esteem. Where that pride of being who we are is lacking, people have the problem of the image of themselves with all the psychological consequences that come with it.

However, as important as it might be, that natural pride can be such that, when not controlled, instead of being an enhancement of our being and an awakening of our dignity, it becomes a vice.

It is against the backdrop of what natural pride can become when it is not controlled that Jesus invites us to humility. Of course, pride can be manifested in many ways and in various circumstances of life, but the point Jesus is considering has to do specifically with the receptions or the parties.

Jesus' first observation is about the guest. To be a guest at the table of someone or at a celebration is an honor, but the way we handle it can elevate us or bring us down. For Jesus, indeed, this honor has to be lived with humility. If someone forgets this virtue, he runs the risk of being ashamed or embarrassed for having taken a place that was not his at the banquet.

Moreover, instead of jumping to the first table, it is rather wise to take a lower place so that the host may eventually honor the guest by inviting him to a place of honor. That is why Jesus reminds us that everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. This is true especially when it is about the kingdom of heaven.

This vision of Jesus is very challenging, because our human nature likes honor, praise and recognition. A dinner, for instance, is an appropriate place where we want to be recognized and given the rank we deserve in society. For that reason, there is a resistance from within that tells us that we should receive an honor we deserve or an acknowledgement corresponding to our position.

We have to realize that the problem is not just about acknowledgment, but our attitude in these gatherings. What Jesus wants is that we come to understand that we are just simple human beings like any other. Therefore, whatever might be our position or rank in society, we have to be humble.

Of course, we might know more than others in society, which brings us acknowledgement, but all that is little in comparison to the sum of all knowledge. After all, what we know is just limited to the domain of our specialization or our studies. Moreover, whatever we might have achieved in life is nothing when we compare it to the reality of death that will indistinctly strike each one of us alike.

Jesus' second observation is about the host. To be a host is also a big privilege and an honor, because we give people an opportunity to know us and share the intimacy of our home, as well as we have the opportunity to know them a little bit better. However, all that has to be done with a spirit of disinterest and without looking to be repaid.

Why? Because, when we give dinner to people who cannot repay us, we make friends in heaven. Those who cannot repay us now are certainly people who will support us when the time of judgment will come at the end of time.

The motivation behind this statement of Jesus lies in the conviction that God is hidden in the needy. Therefore, when we help them, it is God himself we sustain with our material means. But, as he is the creator of everything we have in this world, he will certainly repay us at the resurrection of the righteous.

Let us pray that God may help us open our hearts to the needy! May we take seriously Jesus' example of humility and give to others with compassion, generosity and respect of their dignity! May God bless you all!

Sirach 3: 17-18, 20, 28-29; Hebrews 12: 18-19, 22-24a; Luke 14: 1, 7-14



Homily Date: September 01, 2019
© 2019 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD
Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20190901homily.pdf