

Homily 22nd Sunday OT 2019

One of the most dangerous prayers is this: “Lord, make me humble.”

I think the Lord will always grant this wish. But to teach us humility, he often chooses to create or allow situations that help us grow in humility. And I think growing in humility is about getting in touch with our self-centered way of thinking: thinking we are always right and therefore there is no need to listen and learn.

Humility is not my strong suit. I don't know if it is the training as an engineer, being intelligent or just my personality type, but I often come off very arrogant. I don't mean to. Many times, I am actually trying to be helpful. And often it is not WHAT I say, but HOW I say it. I have been struggling with this since at least 2001.

One opportunity to grow in humility, was when I began military training at Naval Officer School in Newport, Rhode Island. This was a 5-week mini bootcamp experience for doctors, lawyers, chaplains and other professionals coming into the military. It is similar to what you have probably seen, with a bunch of scared looking recruits being yelled at by instructors and running around doing physical training (PT), mental training, marching and learning military protocols and ethics.

The first two weeks were miserable. That's where they tear us down, strip away the individualism and pride and selfishness, before they build us back up into a team.

I remember running out of shaving cream. I was so frustrated that as a 39-year-old man, that I was not allowed to go buy shaving cream without permission and a battle buddy. All kinds of restrictions and rules drove me crazy as well as getting yelled at every day and learning a bunch of unfamiliar things like marching or standing watch in the middle of the night. I did not understand why we were doing all these seemingly unnecessary tasks.

Finally, after 2 weeks, I learned something. I thought to myself. “Chief thinks this training will make me a good officer.... I want to be a good officer..... Therefore, I will do what Chief says.”

After that, the next few weeks seemed to go much smoother. I think I took a step towards humility. I chose to trust the leaders to train us, and I would stop questioning everything we did.

Of course, you may be asking, why do we need humility? Good question.

The Scriptures are very clear about our need for humility: *“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”* (Gospel – Luke 14)

Letter of James 4:6 *“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

Ps 25:9 *“He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.”*

Ps 51: *“A humble, contrite heart you will not despise.”*

And one of St. Catharine’s favorites: Micah 6:8 (website): *8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what the LORD requires of you: To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”*

Humility is a requirement for God to work with us. When we are proud, God will resist us. When we exalt ourselves, God will allow us to be humbled. But if we become humble -- God guides us and teaches us his way and will exalt us.

That is the invitation. TO be in right relationship with God. To acknowledge him as Creator and the one who saves us. And we are his beloved creatures, totally dependent on his goodness.

When talking about humility, one can’t forget to include the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She trusted that God would allow her, a virgin, to bear a son, and that her son would be God’s son, too. She did not understand, yet she trusted, *“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word.”*

What confidence! What humility! What trust. – totally open to being part of God’s plan.

We also learn that we are not in this alone. We need each other. God sends wise people into our lives. But often we choose not to listen because “we know better.” The challenge is to be able to hear God’s wisdom coming through someone else.

This week I had a parishioner come to me and ask to speak. We sat down and she gave me some good advice about leadership and being a pastor, based on her experience working with many priests. I could have easily brushed her off, thinking that I know what I am doing. But something told me to listen. (You know who that was) And I tried to be open that maybe there was a better approach. It was a great lesson and I thank God for having parishioners to help me learn this new job of being a pastor.

Note that there is a connection between humility and prayer. CCC 2559 “Humility is the foundation of prayer.” The first movement of prayer is asking for forgiveness (CCC2631). It is a prerequisite for righteous and pure prayer. A trusting humility brings us back into communion with God. How do we demonstrate this at mass? (we start mass with Act of Penitence.) This asking forgiveness comes from a humble response to God, a conversion, a repentance. It is going against our sense of entitlement.

In humble prayer, we don't demand God to do things, WE ASK him. And we accept whatever he wants to give us. God always answers prayer, but not always in the way we expect, in the time we expect.

Ultimately, humility helps is loving. Loving God and Loving neighbor. Humility allows us to put others' needs before ourselves. We learn to seek the good of others – my kids, my spouse, my congregation. And so, I will give up my preferences in order to serve others.

For example, in his letter to the Ephesians chapter 5, St. Paul instructs husbands to love their wives. Then he ups the ante. Husbands love your wives “as Christ loved the Church.” How did Christ love the Church? – he died for her. St. Paul challenges husbands to sacrifice for the good of their marriage and family. That is one way we live humility.

Because humility is an attitude of Jesus. Jesus did not seek his own comfort and interests. If that was so, he would have never left the comfort of Nazareth, never gone out preaching, never talked out against hypocrisy or reached out to sinners. He would not have been declared dangerous and certainly never would have gone to the cross.

Yet he chose to love us over comfort. He chose to execute the Father's plan over his own desires. Jesus teaches us that humility is about trust and surrender and sacrifice.

So, Let us dare to be dangerous.

Let us pray that dangerous prayer I began with.

“Lord, make me humble.”