

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time C - Humility—Living Under His Mercy

August 31, 2025

In the Gospels, it often seems that the Pharisees are the bad guys. They seem to be waiting around every corner, scheming up ways to attack Jesus. Today, in the Christian imagination, these men are often dismissed entirely as greedy, hypocritical, and stubborn people who are far from the Kingdom of God. But there is more to their story, and we should rethink them today. Three Things about the Pharisees. First, they were members of the Jewish people who could never make peace with the fact that the Gentiles, in this case, the Romans, had taken over God's holy land and subjugated God's holy people. As such, they taught to never make peace with sin in life. Second, they were men and women who were sincerely saddened and tired of their own people's inability to stay in covenant with God. They wanted to make things right with God. As such, they taught to seek God in all things and to attempt to live before Him in humility and reverence. Third, they wanted to do everything they could to regain God's favour in order to right their wrongs. Their main attempt at this was to try to bring the holiness of the Temple into their personal lives. Thus, the rules regarding the Temple were extended to all of domestic life. As such, they taught to aim for true holiness and to take faith seriously. The intentions were noble to begin. But over time, things changed. As the Pharisees gained respect and influence, a type of spiritual pride began to spread among them. This spiritual pride is often the focal point of Jesus' criticisms against them. Jesus did not have any issue with their religiosity and for staying clean. It was rather their spiritual pride. Perhaps it is common danger for a spiritual person to feel that they are better than others and that they have earned a right to judge others. Jesus said to the Pharisees: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean." (Matthew 23:25-26) Yes, the Pharisees got many things right. We should imitate their fervour and sincere desire to be faithful to God. But, let us not be like them in their hypocrisy and spiritual pride. They forgot to walk humbly with their God, as the Prophet Micah tells us all: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

The New Testament tells us something about **the humility of Jesus**. In Philippians 2:7-8 we read that Jesus, "...emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross." Jesus took the lowest place possible, literally his death on a cross. A great spiritual author of our time is Fr. Donald Haggerty. In his newest book, *The Hour of Testing*, he profoundly meditates on the humility of Christ. He also clarifies what we mean by Christian humility.

He writes: "Perhaps there is no real humility in us until Christ's humility in his Passion overcomes our own illusion of being in any way humble. Most of us misjudge humility. The real measure of humility is not a matter of timidity in human relations, for instance, thinking always less of ourselves in comparison to others, or pursuing a constant sense of unworthiness. The only truly deep understanding of humility comes after a long gaze on God, humiliated by corrupt men inflicting abuse, and mockery on Jesus Christ crucified in the hours of his Passion." Standing before the insults, the beating, and the spitting of the Roman soldiers, God is silent, God still loves. God didn't have to do this. Fr. Haggerty finishes by saying, "The silence of God in the face of the insults, the jeers, the cackling mockery directed at Jesus in his passion is an extraordinary thing. The choice of God to be treated with contempt, to be spit upon by men—and yet still to love them as pitiful and lowly sons—is the reality of the most genuine humility." (Passages taken from *The Hour of Testing*, page 231)

Genuine humility means we are to assume the place of the lowly, walk in their shoes and sit in their seat and know life from their perspective. When we have learned what they have to teach us, we may indeed be invited to take a higher place. It is God who determines authentic honourable status. The opinion of human beings, especially friends and cronies, is unreliable. We are often conditioned to view our gifts as if they are our own, without realizing that they are all from God and are to be used for

the good of the community. The truth is we are all vessels of clay and have much to be modest about. God took hold of our worthless dust and gave it eternal value by turning it into his own image and likeness. We need to practise humility if we are to be true to ourselves and God. It is the key to open the gate of heaven for us. Pride goes before the fall. If we are so full of ourselves, there is little room for God in our lives. God rejects the proud and raises up the humble - for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and the one who humbles himself will be exalted. Pope Francis set a good example for us - when he became pope, he chose to live in the Casa Santa Marta guesthouse rather than the Apostolic Palace to avoid isolated grandeur and to be closer to people.

When we embrace a true humility after the heart of Jesus, many beautiful fruits begin to grow in our souls. We are transformed; we become good human beings as well as saintly Christians. Among the many fruits, we can name four: First, a humble soul has a deep peace. One's main concern now in life is no longer temporal affairs and concerns. One does not try to get rich, live forever, or accomplish some major project. One may do all these things for sure, but one is most interested in striving for the narrow door which is the cross of Christ. One is not easily frantic or nervous. One has given over to God the reins of one's life. Second, a humble soul respects others and gets to the essence and heart of things. A gentle soul has no hidden agenda. One doesn't use other people for one's selfish ends. One lives in the truth. A humble soul is very good at seeing the heart of others and the heart of the matter. Third, one is docile to God. One is not too concerned about the path down which God leads. One has stopped comparing oneself to others and doesn't envy others. A humble soul embraces the path ahead as God-given. One may see difficulties ahead, but one knows that love conquers all. Nothing is too much to ask for love. Fourth, in essence, a humble soul lives out this prayer: "Jesus, Meek and Humble of Heart, make my heart more like yours!" When this prayer is answered in one's life, one begins to embody the love and compassion of Christ.

After all, Jesus is our role model for humility. When he was addressed as the good teacher, he said no one is good except the Father. And he came to do the Father's will. I would be bold to say that Jesus' life path shows us 3 steps: to learn, to earn, to serve. Jesus learned everything as the Father has taught him; he earned the respect he got from his followers as people were saying he taught with authority; Jesus is the master and teacher of all and yet he said, "I come not to be served but to serve". Some of our modern day leaders think they can do whatever they want because they have the power and so they would cause pain and suffering to people, they would build their "castle" with gold instead of serving the needy and the down trodden. The Chinese great philosopher Confucius saw humility as a strength and essential for learning and self-improvement, rather than a sign of weakness. He emphasized recognizing the limits of one's own knowledge—knowing "what you know and what you do not know"—to foster a continuous pursuit of wisdom and avoid arrogance. This intellectual humility allows for growth and the acceptance of new ideas, leading to a deeper understanding and a more accurate self-assessment. A very good example of this kind of self-assessment in the Bible is the tax-collector who had no good deeds to mention, but offered his humility instead and was relieved of a heavy burden of sins. Finally, Mary, our mother, is the quintessential embodiment of true humility. In her magnificat, she proclaims:

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name."