

ORDINARY SUNDAY XXII "C"
AUGUST 31/SEPTEMBER 1, 2019

Benjamin Whichcote, nineteenth century English philosopher and theologian known for his pithy quotes once stated: "None are as empty as those who are full of themselves."

Prideful people are always telling you about themselves, their accomplishments, how chosen, smart, wonderful, and great they are. Then they look at you and others to continue the conversation about **them** and affirm **their** magnificence.

Today's Gospel story of Jesus' presence at a Sabbath dinner at the home of a prominent Pharisee and his observation of the guests jockeying for the most favorable spots at table, provides the setting for Jesus to instruct us on the lifestyle that all who share table fellowship here in the Eucharist are to emulate. Accompanied by the first reading from the book of Sirach, today's Scriptures set before us the virtue and the practice of humility.

So what is humility, and what makes humble people different? **Humility is the absence of self in all we think, do or say.** You know when you encounter humility because you are irresistibly drawn to and awestruck by its presence. Humble people are interested in everyone else. In conversations, they want to know about you. They are not looking for ways they can use you to serve their personal agendas or selfish ends. Instead, they are looking for ways they can serve you, lift you up. Humility is the opposite of pride and arrogance. Pride is concerned with who is right. Humility is concerned with what is right. Pride seeks to divide people. Humility brings people together. Pride looks down at everyone else. Humility looks up.

Two examples of the humility Jesus and Sirach call us to come to mind; one from personal observation, the other from an article I read recently.

Last Sunday I went to visit my mother at Wellington Place in Decorah, the care center where she now lives. As in past visits, I witnessed what humble service in imitation of Jesus looks like. Nurses and the other health-care aides along with administrative office workers know and respectfully call each resident by name. Health-care aides patiently assist those, like my

mother who now has some mobility issues, transfer from a chair to a wheelchair or walker, assist with bathing and basic hygiene care, spoon feed some residents needing such assistance in the dining area, and in other ways give of themselves so that those in their care can live as comfortably and with as much dignity as possible; offering a comforting word or touch, giving a compliment on how nice they look or a good job done at therapy. They do this day in and day out. They are just one example of other people in many areas of life who do the same. These are the saints among us. This is greatness as Jesus speaks about it.

The second example is a Catholic parish in the poorest section of the city of San Francisco, California. This parish church opens its doors weekdays at 6:00 a.m. to welcome about 150 of its unhoused neighbors who have spent the night on the streets and gives them a secure place for a few hours of rest. They call it “sacred sleep.” These women and men—some with mental health issues, others addicted to drugs, all of them rejected in some way by family, friends, and our society—sleep on the pews in the back two-thirds of the church. At 12:15 p.m. daily the parishioners gather for Mass in the front part of the church as their neighbors sleep behind them. After Mass, some parishioners stay to share a meal and conversation with their unhoused neighbors offering them material and spiritual support. Again, this is what humility looks like. This is the Church as a “field hospital” as described by Pope Francis. This is the Kingdom of God among us. Is my self-understanding that I am someone to be served, or one who serves?

At the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem there is a door so low one must stoop to enter. This door was fashioned to prevent medieval raiders from riding their horses into the church in a prideful display of political and military might wreaking mayhem on the sacred space. The door is known as “The Humility Gate.” Jesus and Sirach challenge us today to enter the Kingdom of God through it.

1 September 2019
Father Jim Secora