

The Way of Humility

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Mk 9:30-37
Ave Maria Catholic Church. September 22, 2024. Fr. David M Vidal

He was teaching his disciples and telling them: *“The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death he will rise.”* This is the second prediction of the Passion of Christ.

However, the disciples didn’t understand. In the first prediction, it was Peter who did not understand the teaching of the Passion, (Mk. 9: 31). And Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. Then, Jesus told Peter: *“Get behind me, Satan, you are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do,”* (Mk. 8: 33).

We can imagine that the disciples remembered those words, and this time, nobody wanted to make it necessary for Jesus to rebuke them again. They didn’t understand Jesus’s saying, but they were afraid to question him, as if they were afraid of bad news.

They didn’t understand the meaning of the passion. They didn’t understand the meaning of the cross. For that reason, while they continued walking, a completely different topic arose.

The question was: Who is the greatest?!

How far this question is from the prediction of the Passion! The Passion of Christ speaks about humiliation, and the disciples' question speaks about vainglory.

That was not the only time a question like that was discussed among them. In fact, one day the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus and ask Him, *“Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left.”*

Jesus said to them, *you don’t know what you are asking.* Then, the ten heard the request of the two brothers and became indignant. The most probable reason for their reaction was because they wanted to have that position as well. Jesus instead gathered them and said to them: *“Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant, whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. (And Jesus offers His example) For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many,”* (Mk. 10: 35ff).

The disciples were walking on the wide path of pride, which, in the end, would lead to perdition. Jesus showed them the way of humility, the secure road of humility, the narrow path that leads to the glory of heaven.

The book of Ecclesiasticus teaches us: “*Pride was not made for man,*” (Ecclesiasticus 10: 22). And pride was not made for us for several reasons, all of which are centered around Jesus’ teaching on humility.

The first reason for humility is that we are created. We came out of nothing. There was a time when we did not exist, and the world kept spinning without us. How humbling that is! Nobody on this earth was missing us, and nobody in this world was thinking about us. Only God had us in His mind because we are His creation, the work of His hands. That thought should humble us. We depend on God for all that we are and all that we have.

There is also a second reason for humility: our sins and weaknesses. Our nature was wounded by sin. First, it is because of the sin of our parents Adam and Eve, and then because of our own faults and shortcomings. When we say at the beginning of Mass: “*I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault,*” that is not a figurative image, but it is plain truth. That prayer should humble us. This is why we also pray to our Father in Heaven: “Forgive our trespasses, that is, forgive my sins.” And that is why we ask our Mother in Heaven: “Pray for us sinners, that is, pray for me, a sinner.”

And if that were not sufficient reason for living the virtue of humility in our lives, we also know something else: our time here on earth has a measure, and at a certain moment, **we will be accountable for our actions before God.** The proud person does not think about accountability. The proud person thinks that he made himself, and if he did not achieve something, it is because he hasn’t figured it out yet. But the proud person misses the point, and he misses it badly. We are not the creators or even the owners of our gifts, but we are simple administrators, and we must render an account of the use of the gifts that God has lent to us. That thought should humble us.

According to Aquinas, the word humility comes from the word humus, which means earth, or in particular, the under-earth. It is the soft and spongy soil that any seed or plant needs to grow. In some ways, we are that soil. At the beginning of Lent (Ash Wednesday), do we not say, “You are dust and to dust you shall return”?

A central component of St. Thomas’s formulation of the virtue of humility is man’s reverence for God. St. Thomas is clear about humility’s formal motive of reverence for God in almost every article of Aquinas’ studies on this virtue, (*Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 161, a. 1, ad. 5; a. 2, ad. 3; a. 3, c. and ad. 1; a. 4, ad. 1; a. 6, c.).

Humility allows us to profess this truth firmly: We are not God! I am not God! If we are not God and if we have been created by God, taken from the dust and receiving God’s breath of life, then, we have an eternal debt to our Creator. That is the fertile soil from

which every good thing will come to us. Let us plant whatever we want on this soil, and we will gather fruits in abundance; we will be truly rich.

Now, if those three reasons were not enough, there is one more, and it is very important: “The Word (the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity) became flesh and dwelt among us” and showed us with His very life **the way of humility**.

Jesus took the office of our Mediator and Redeemer by clearly showing us how we are reconciled to God. The word of God humbled Himself and took the form of a slave. And then, as our Teacher, He taught us the great lesson we must learn from Him as He says: “*Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart,*” (Matthew 11: 19)

His whole life was a lesson of humility, but if there is a moment when that virtue excels, that is the moment of His passion:

It is true that the passion of our Lord presents all the great virtues for our imitation, either self-denial, poverty of spirit, obedience, silence, patience, prayer, and love. But in a very special way, during His Passion Jesus appears as the Master of humility. His passion is the book of humility, His Cross is the throne of humility, the terrible way from the Mount of Olives to Mount Calvary is the substantive exposition of His words, “*Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart.*”

How true are the words of the book of Ecclesiasticus: “*Pride was not made for us!*” Then, why are we still questioning who is the greatest among us? Why are we still looking for a place of honor?

The words of Jesus in today’s gospel speak by themselves: “*If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all,*” (Mk 9: 35).

Let us ask for the grace to grow in the virtue of humility. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, who calls herself the handmaid, the servant of the Lord, guide us through this holy, humble, and narrow path that leads to the glory of eternal life.