

Fr. John's Homily for August 28, 2022. 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

JMJ CHS

It didn't take too much effort to recognize a theme for today's readings. The Gospel and the first reading seem to be talking about the all important virtue of humility. With Sirach, from the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament, we have some beautiful words of advice:

*My child, conduct your affairs with humility,  
and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts.  
Humble yourself the more, the greater you are,  
and you will find favor with God.*

And then in the Gospel at dinner at a Pharisee's house, Jesus uses the opportunity to lecture the not-so-humble Pharisees about humility. Good advice for religious leaders of all times and places. And everybody else as well.

I think we would all agree that humility is a good virtue to have. And it would be very humble of us to admit that we are all in need of more of it. But we have this dilemma; there is this constant *tension* between who we are, at our very core, and who we are called upon to be. This was best expressed by that famous philosopher, professor M.A.C. Davis, who once wrote the words, "Oh Lord it's hard to be humble, when you're perfect in every way" ( for the uninformed, Mac Davis was a country and western singer).

Yes, we have been given many pieces of advice from the Bible and other sources which encourages us to pursue this virtue:

*"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble".*

*"Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God."*

*"Whoever humbles himself, like a little child, will be greater in the kingdom of heaven."*

And of course, the story of Adam and Eve is the ultimate lesson in humility. Their sin was pride which stands in opposition to humility. It is self-aggrandizement; it is giving ourselves more worth than we truly have. In my humble opinion, it is having a higher opinion of myself than I should have.

And many Catholics are familiar with a prayer called *The Litany of Humility*. We are not sure of the original author, but whoever it was, they had some pretty deep insights about the nature of this virtue. People who have been introduced to it are shocked at what it means to be humble. Some examples:

From the desire of being held in high esteem, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being loved, of being honored, of being praised, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being chosen over others, from the desire of being consulted, or approved, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the fear of being humiliated, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the fear of being despised, from the fear of being forgotten, ridiculed, wronged, or suspected, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

So, as you can see, it is indeed very hard to be humble. Humility goes against the grain. It stands in opposition to our fallen human nature. It is a sign of contradiction to the things that the world considers important.

I was in our Book and Gift Shop the other day, relaxing in that new white wingback chair, when it happened .....again. A book on the shelf seemed to jump off right into my hands. The word “humility” was part of the title and so it caught my eye. The full title is *Humility Rules*, and it is a play on words. The word RULES can be understood either as a verb or as a noun. Used as a verb it means that rules are important. They should be followed. And it would be an act of humility to follow them.

The word RULES as a noun actually refers to the contents of the book. The author is referring to *The Rule of Saint Benedict* which is his collection of rules of spiritual behavior for monks. They have been around for over 1,000 years and are beneficial for everybody, including those of us who do not live in monasteries.

The author is Augustine Wetta, a Benedictine monk at St. Louis Abbey in Missouri. And he sounds like a bit of a character. He has a twinkle in his eye. He is a poet, he has played rugby, he is a surfer and a juggler, and was a part of a performing troupe called *The Flying Fettuccine Brothers*. The picture on the front cover of his book should give us a clue about him. It shows a classic picture of Saint Benedict, but he is holding a red skateboard.

But on the inside is a 12 step program based on *Saint Benedict's Rules*. It is written in understandable English for the modern, younger crowd. It reminds me of that St. Joan of Arc book from a few weeks ago. It is a quality book which feels good in the hand. And there is lots of interesting artwork on the inside. Maybe it is another good book that you can give away to a young person.

And the interesting thing about this book is that, in most cases, the RULES stand in opposition to what the world has taught us these past 50 years. And I am contending again that the world has *sold us a bill of goods*. We've been conned; we've been misled; we've listened to those false teachers that we were warned about. What the world has taught us is not what Jesus had in mind, which should not be a big surprise. But here are some interesting examples from St. Benedict's 12 step program. I'll only give you a few :

Step 1. Be Afraid. Be afraid? The interesting thing here is that this advice stands not only in opposition to the world, but also in opposition to what Jesus himself taught, and Pope John Paul II, St. Joan of Arc, and many other saints who always tell us to be NOT afraid. But what St. Benedict is really saying is to always *have the fear of the Lord before your eyes*. That's a quote from one of the Psalms. And remember that famous admonition; “*The beginning of wisdom, IS the fear of the Lord*”. Never forget that God is God and we are not. That's humility!

Step 2. Don't be true to yourself. Not exactly what the world would say. But the instruction here is to **Self Denial**. Seek the will of God, not your own. Remember from *The Lord's Prayer*, “May Thy will be done,(not my will be done). And from Mary, be it done unto me according to your word. ....yes, Be true..... not to yourself, but to God.

Step 3. Don't follow your dreams. **Obedience** is the key word here. Be obedient to those in authority over you. Remember that Jesus became obedient unto death. So, be prepared. God's dream for you may be different than your dream for yourself. Besides, have you ever stopped to consider that if everybody followed their dreams, this world would be total chaos. Some dreams are just wrong. Others are downright evil.

Step 5. Put your worst foot forward. His word here is **Repentance**. That's the idea. Go to confession, and be absolved of your worst.

Step 6. I like this one. Be unassertive. **Use Discretion**. But, Benedict would say, if you must speak, do so gently, earnestly, quietly, and humbly, with a few sensible words. For it is written "the wiseman is known by the fewness of his words".

Ok, I'll give you just one more. I think you're getting the idea.

Step 7. Be someone's doormat. Keyword here, **Serenity**. While the world will say don't let anybody walk over you, Jesus would remind us that *the last will be first, and the first will be last*. He said to his apostles. *The greatest among you must be as the least*.

So, like so many other things in our faith life, it is a struggle to fulfill the higher standards of being a Christian. IMHO. In my humble opinion, the best thing we can do, I believe, is to ask God for what we need. We have, after all, been told, "Ask and you shall receive. Seek you will find. Knock and the door will be opened for you."

And so, Lord, teach us to pray. Lord grant us more faith today. And Lord, please, grant us all a little more humility.

Let's close with a passage from Saint Paul and his letter to the Colossians (3:12-13):

*Because you are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy, with kindness,, meekness, and patience, and humility. Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Amen.*

~Fr. John