

Go Forth...

A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD

SUNDAY READINGS:

SIRACH 3:17-18, 20, 28-29

PSALM 68:4-7, 10-11

HEBREWS 12:18-19, 22-24

— LUKE 14:1, 7-11



Today's first reading and Gospel focus our reflection on humility. They also remind us of that popular biblical passage from the prophet Micah (6:8): "This is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God." Personally, I treasure that quote, since it was our chosen "class motto" while we were in the seminary preparing to be missionaries.

Many people may have a mistaken notion about "Christian humility." It is not centered on thinking low of yourself or even denying your true worth, gifts and talents. We readily accept that we are weak and sinful individuals, yet we always remain beloved creatures fashioned in God's own image (Gen 1:26-27). Authentic humility is based on the recognition and thankful awareness that the virtues we have all originate in God's love and grace. Thus, we strive to continue to offer genuine love and humble service to our neighbors.

Mary as Model. Christians can look to Mary as a shining example of humility, for even when she is told by the angel that she has been chosen to be the Mother of the Messiah, the very Son of God, she referred to herself as the mere "handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1:38). It is noteworthy that the word "handmaid" in the original New Testament Greek is: *doula*, which literally means "slave." Such was Mary's humility; she put her life totally at God's disposal.

Mary's humility shines out further as she gives all glory and praise to God for the privileges she has received. She declares in her *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-49): "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my savior; because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid [slave]. From this day forward all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me."

Papal Reflections. Saint John Paul II, in his homily for the fiftieth anniversary of the definition of Mary's Assumption (November 1, 1950-2000), noted that in her *Magnificat* "Mary shows what constituted the foundation of her holiness: *deep humility*.... Before the mystery of grace, the experience of a particular presence of God who has rested his gaze upon her, Mary feels a natural impulse of humility....It is the reaction of someone who is fully aware of her own littleness before the greatness of God."

Pope Francis in his *The Joy of Love* (*Amoris Laetitia*) noted that authentic love must be "marked by humility; if we are to understand, forgive and serve others from the heart, our pride has to be healed and our humility must increase" (98).

Conclusion. In its most profound and beautiful sense, humility simply means to strive to be like Jesus, Mary, the saints, and many other ordinary Christians that we personally know. We seek to imitate Jesus, who said: "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29). Humility invites us to be like Jesus, who said: "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve" (Mk 10:45). It means to "walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6:8).





NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading – Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29: It is truly remarkable that the inspired Old Testament books contain relevant teachings of lasting value. The Book of Sirach, dated around 180 B.C., represents the teaching of a famous Jewish teacher. Today we read the insights and advice for a younger generation: be a humble person. Undoubtedly, this advice is valid for people of all ages.

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 68:4-7, 10-11: This psalm stresses God's care for the humble and poor of society in a variety of images. The Lord is "the father of orphans," and "the defender of widows." He "gives a home to the forsaken" and "leads forth prisoners to prosperity." Truly, "in your goodness, O God, you have provided for the needy."

Second Reading – Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24: This is our final reading from the unique letter to the Hebrews. It draws a comparison between the giving of the Old Testament on Mount Sinai and the giving of the New Testament on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. The first was transmitted amid frightening circumstances; the second was given in the midst of a joyful assembly.

Gospel – Luke 14:1, 7-11: Our Gospel today by Saint Luke continues the theme of humility that needs to be reflected in our thoughts and actions. Imitating Jesus, we are to show special care and heartfelt compassion for the poor, lepers, Samaritans, publicans, public sinners, women, and needy individuals. And, we should rejoice that they cannot repay us in this life; we leave the rewarding to God alone.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who has recently published *Walking with Pope Francis: The Official Documents in Everyday Language* (Orbis Books) as well as *Exploring Vatican II Treasures: Actors, Events, Insights and A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis* (Faith Alive Books).

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