

REFLECTIONS FOR THE 22ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 28 August 2022

The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale

In today's Liturgy of the Word, humility is the theme threaded through all our readings. In our world today, this quality is often confused with devaluing ourselves or being submissive to others or allowing ourselves to be considered inferior to other. Therefore, it is discarded as having any place in our lives. Yet all religious traditions value humility. Let us reflect on how our readings show us "an irony of inverted expectations" when considering the true and valued meaning of this quality of life.



Rich Humus

Our first inverted expectation comes from the origin of the word that, in both English ("humility") and Spanish ("humildad"), is the Latin word "humus" which means "earth" or "soil" or "ground." This awareness suggests that we must explore humility beyond simply a human characteristic. Indeed, humility speaks to right relationship – with self, with other humans, with Earth, and with God.

The reading from Sirach today focuses on two of these relationships: with God and with self. Sirach reminds us that we actually learn to be humble

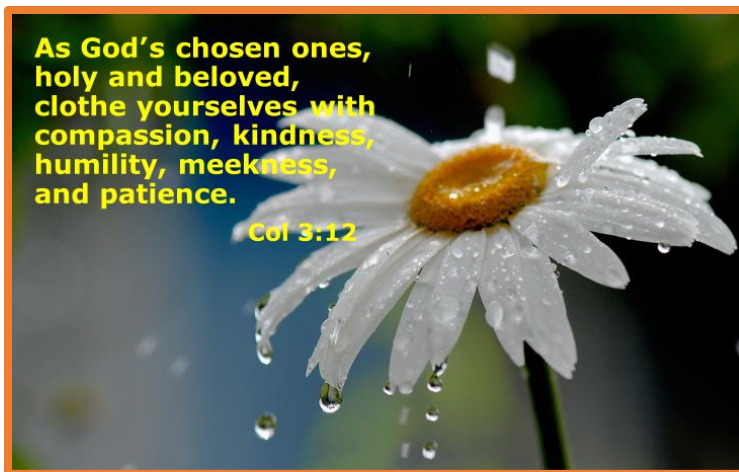
from God, "For great is the might of the Lord; but by the humble the Lord is glorified" (Sir 3:20). The writer of Hebrews echoes this in the words which contrast the powerful image of God ("a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them" – Sir 3:18-19) with the image of a humble, approachable God ("the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" – Sir 3:22-23).

Psalm 68 strengthens that image with a God who is the "Father of orphans and protector of widows" (Ps 68:5), who "gives the desolate a home to live in; and leads out the prisoners to prosperity" (Ps 68:6), and who "provided for the needy" (Ps 68:10). This loving, humble God showers rains in abundance and provides a dwelling for the flock (Ps 68:9-10). In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus pleads with us, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt 11:29).



If acting in the image of a humble God is one dimension of our relationship in humility with God, the second one is our praise and thanks to God who creates and sustains us. The psalmist proclaims, "Let the righteous be joyful, let them exult before God; let them be jubilant with joy. Sing to God, sing praises to God's name; lift up a song to God who rides upon the clouds" (Ps 68:3-4). According to Sikhism, all people, equally, have to bow before God so there ought to be no hierarchies among or between people.

The relationship with others in humility is described in the reading from Sirach in which “love is experienced in giving, rather than receiving; greatness is revealed in humility; wisdom is a better listener than talker” (words of John Kavanaugh, sj). In the reading from Luke’s Gospel, Jesus teaches a parable about a meal in which he challenges the guests to not seek the highest places and the host to include those who will not repay for the honour they receive. This sense of inclusion and welcome is at the heart of the relationship of humility. Veronica Lawson rsm explains that Jesus’ parable “embodied the inclusive values of the kin-dom vision that he had preached from the outset. It is confronting for us in our times. It is easy to welcome like-minded people into our land and our homes. It is not so easy to be open to those who see the world differently from us. We are invited to look on them with love rather than hostility and to secure a place for them in our hearts and in our common home.”



Perhaps the best description of the way of humility in our communion with each other comes from the letter to the Colossians, “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect

harmony” (Col 3:12-14). In the words of the Quran, “The servants of the Merciful are those who walk the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, ‘Peace’” (Quran, 25:63).

In our relationship with self, humility does not call for us to demean our gifts or devalue our goodness. Joan Chittister csj reminds us that “Humility is authenticity.” To be humble is to be firmly grounded in knowledge of self, to be rooted in a realistic understanding of who we are as individuals. Monica Kavanaugh says, “By helping us to realize our strengths and reconcile our weaknesses, humility frees us from ‘having to pretend that we are more than, or other than, who we truly are’. In proper practice, humility is said to magnify all other positive attributes.” Every good in yourself is a gift from God and is meant to be given back to the Lord by being shared with others.

Humility is not to deny our talents and gifts but to recognize them and live up to our worth and something greater. It is in the service to others that is the greatest form of humility. The Hindu tradition teaches, “Each human being the Universal, recognizing and feeling oneness with everyone and everything else in the universe, without inferiority or superiority or any other bias, is the mark of humility” (Swami Vivekananda, 19th century).

The prophet Micah brings together the relationship with self, others, and God marked by humility when he proclaims, “God has told you, O mortal, what



is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic 6:8).

The last element of our "inverted expectations" about humility is the realization that humility, flowing from its original root, speaks to our relationship with Earth. We get a hint of this from the first book of Chronicles when God says, "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chron 7:14). Kevin Hall tells us, "Persons, close to Earth, are invited to humility. Earth, the primary element of Life, to which we are naturally close, inspires and influences us with words we have used throughout the centuries to designate and define ourselves." He goes on to say, "The origin of 'humility' is the Latin word 'humus' meaning *soil*, specifically rich, dark, organic soil. When a seed is planted in fertile soil, it transforms into something far greater. When we have sufficient humus in our lives, we grow and develop, and foster those around us to flourish. Humility produces growth."

Rachel Carson, the environmentalist, goes even further and tell us, "It is a wholesome and necessary thing for us to turn again to the Earth and in the contemplation of her beauties to know the sense of wonder and humility."



In his *Markings*, Dag Hammarskjöld says so beautifully, "To have humility is to experience reality, not in relation to ourselves, but in its sacred independence. . . In the point of rest at the center of our being, we encounter a world where all things are at rest in the same way. Then a tree becomes a mystery, a cloud a revelation, each person a cosmos of whose riches we can only catch glimpses. The life of simplicity is simple, but it opens to us a book in which we never get beyond the first syllable."

These words lead us into this coming week when we begin the celebration of the Season of Creation, starting on September 1 and ending on October 4, which Pope Francis defines the Season of Creation as "an opportunity to cultivate our 'ecological conversion.'" The logo for this year's celebration is the burning bush of Exodus 3. This year's theme is "Listen to the Voice of Creation," flowing from the opening words of Psalm 19, "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge...their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the Earth, and their words to the end of the world." (19: 1-4). God's creation moans ever louder and suffers more every day amidst the ongoing climate emergency and biodiversity crisis.

The religious leaders who invite us to this year's season of Creation remind us, "The harmonies that emerge when we contemplate the books of creation and Scripture form our cosmology about who we are, where we are, and how we are called to live in right relationships with God and our co-creatures." The response which we are called to make is one which embraces all the relationships marked by humility: "During the Season of Creation, our common prayer and action can help us listen for the voices of those who are silenced. In prayer we lament the individuals, communities, species, and ecosystems who are lost, and those whose livelihoods are threatened by habitat loss and climate change. In prayer we centre the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor."

The poet, Steve Garnaas-Holmes, helps bring all the threads of our readings and the Season of Creation, intertwined with humility, in this profound prayer-poem:

Wisdom speaks not only to an individual at a party,
but to the human species included in Creation.
Humans have assigned ourselves the place of honor,
the crown of Creation, the pinnacle of evolution;
but we are superfluous, a parasite,
contributing nothing to the food chain.
The world was fine and beautiful without us,
praising God in beauty of movement, song and form,
playing, dancing, loving young ones,
communities performing their symphony of harmony—
and they will still after we are gone.
Wisdom invites us to take the lowest place
at the table of Creation, supporting from beneath,
where feet are washed, and fallen crumbs cherished.
What if we were to serve, not conquer? Bless, not rob?
What might it be like for humanity
to be a doorkeeper in the house of God?
What might we find in the lowest place,
closest to the Creator?

There is much to ponder as we enter, intentionally and humbly, this Season of Creation!

