

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

Every now and then we meet someone in life who in spite of their sufferings, be it the result of illness, loss, or isolation, amazingly exudes a positive outlook and projects a warm smile. Their own cares and concerns are secondary to those of others. We all, I'm sure, know people who fall into this category which could be entitled, "That's incredible." In fact, just this week I anointed a gentleman from our parish who clearly is dying. Every breath is a struggle. And yet, when I walked into his home, he said, "Father, I have absolutely no complaints. I have had a great life." What faith!

The second reading today presents us with another character who displayed amazing grace under trying circumstances, namely St. Paul. In spite of shipwrecks on his many journeys, personal weakness often referred to as "the thorn in the flesh" and imprisonment, St. Paul managed to hold his head high, keep a happy face, and put the concerns of others before his own.

Today's selection from Paul's letter to the Philippians is one of the four so called "captivity letters" which is to say it was written from prison. Interestingly enough, there is no hint of bitterness or frustration in the pen of St. Paul who finds himself behind bars. In this short letter, which comprises four chapters, Paul offers thanks and prayers to the Philippians. And in today's account Paul exhorts the Philippians to have a spirit of unity and concern for one another, at the expense of oneself. He writes, "Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others." In short, St. Paul calls the Philippians to embrace the attitude of Christ, who "emptied himself" even to death on the cross. For St. Paul, Jesus demonstrates clearly and cogently the true model of Christian living which is rooted in humility.

St. Augustine echoes the importance of this Christian virtue. He once said of humility, "Humility is the foundation of all other virtue; hence in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance."

The word humility comes from the word "humus" which refers to the earth and/or the ground. The person of humility lowers oneself. Essentially there is a descent involved, a coming down from a pedestal or lofty stature to be with and for others.

Unfortunately the world in which we live does not generally support, let alone understand, this blessed virtue. In fact, the world would like us to believe, "It's all about me, myself, and I," – the other Trinity, and that the needs of others are always secondary to our own. But just because the world espouses this philosophy does not make it right. While it may work for the world, it certainly does not work for the Kingdom.

Everyday we are called to be like Jesus, to empty ourselves and live and die for one another even to the point of suffering and death.

The Gospel for today reveals that there is often a big gulf between saying and doing. That is, we might say we are Christians, but our actions are void of such reality. It takes humility not only to recognize this gap in our lives, but to change for the better and break out of our habitual ways. St. Paul not only offers us the words today, but also the deeds. He was one of the greatest sinners who became one of the most treasured saints. He kept his word and spread the faith with humility as the foundation. And that is all the Lord asks of us. So, today, tomorrow, or however long we have, remember, "Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather humbly regard others as more important than yourself, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others."