

22nd Sunday per Annum - C
Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29;
Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a;
Luke 14:1, 7-14
Little Flower - 9/1/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

Both today's reading from Sirach and today's Gospel focus on the virtue of humility. The book of Sirach is part of the Wisdom literature of the Bible. As I mentioned in last week's homily, the Wisdom literature offers all kinds of practical insights into real life.

The reading from Sirach begins, "*My child, conduct your affairs with humility.*" I would suggest humility is the recognition that we are not self-made men or women. It is the recognition that all that we are and all that we have are God's gifts to us either directly or indirectly through others. As much as adolescents and young adults try to be independent and self-sufficient, the truth is that human beings are interdependent.

Sirach advises, "*Humble yourself the more, the greater you are.*" There is practical wisdom in this advice. The more we are rich, famous, attractive, intelligent, athletic, or successful, the more we are tempted to think we are self-made. It is often much harder for gifted people and high achievers to be humble.

True humility requires gratitude and generosity. I have told this story before, but it is worth telling again. One time I was talking to a minister who was the father of that year's Brownsburg High School valedictorian. When I congratulated him and his wife on their daughter's achievements and valedictory address, he said, "My wife and I are humbly grateful." He went on to explain that both he and his wife recognized how many people contributed to their daughter's success.

At the same time, if we are humbly grateful to all those who positively influenced us, we will want both to give back to them and to positively influence others by sharing our gifts, talents, time, and even treasure with others, especially those who are most in need. In the Acts of the Apostles, St. Paul quotes Jesus as saying, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" [20:35]. Humbly grateful people almost always feel very good when they give or give back generously.

According to Sirach, "*What is too sublime for you, seek not, into things beyond your strength search not.*" Humbly grateful people recognize their limitations and try to maximize their strengths and minimize their weaknesses. Likewise, wise individuals appreciate proverbs. In other words, they recognize the importance of the collective wisdom of the community. For example, when I used to teach morality, I always made the point that the Catholic moral tradition represents the Christian wisdom of the ages.

The parable in today's Gospel gives a concrete example of humility. Parables make a stronger impression on us when we see the parable in practice. This parable struck me more this year than in previous years because I saw a concrete example at my 70th birthday party. Because this was a parish party, the only people besides parishioners who were invited were my immediate family and a young couple, Cameron and Haley, part of the family with whom I spend my vacation. They were at the 10:30 Mass. After Mass, they did not stay in church to see me. When I came over to the parish hall, I did not immediately see them. They had seated themselves in the back row in the corner although I am almost 100% sure I had told them I would have reserved places for them in front.

My brothers and sisters, today's reading from Hebrews offers us hope. The images in the first part are negative and frightening. The images in the second part are positive and welcoming. They represent two very different understandings of God. It seems to me that the passage reminds us that when we approach God, we need not be afraid. This is true when we approach him during our lives, at the moment of our death, and when Jesus returns in glory. Like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, God always welcomes us with open arms.