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Humility Opens Doors

Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio



“Nice guys finish last,” says the world. “The last will be first,” replies Jesus.

My guess is that the Lord of creation knows best who really wins in the end. And he says in this Sunday’s gospel, “whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14:11).

To understand why the humble get ahead and why the meek shall inherit the earth, we need to be sure that we understand what humility and meekness really are.

Humility does not mean looking down on oneself or thinking ill of oneself. It really means not thinking of oneself very much at all.

The humble are free to forget themselves because they are secure. They accept the fact that, as creatures, they are small, vulnerable, and not ultimately in control. But they know there is a Creator who is great, omnipotent, and totally in control. And they know that they’ve been made in the image and likeness of that Creator. That makes gives them a dignity that they don’t have to earn and can never be taken away. Though they’ve tarnished the divine likeness through sin, they know that the Creator came down from the heights of heaven to become human and fix what they couldn’t fix.

So when they mess up, the humble don’t have to cover up. They just say “please forgive me,” give thanks for God’s mercy, and move on. And when their creaturely limitations cause them to fail, they are not surprised. They realize that they are not God.

All this is simply a way of saying that **the humble are in touch with reality.**

If the definition of insanity is being out of touch with reality, then our proud world with its “nice guys finish last” illusion is clearly insane.

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Since the humble are secure, they are strong. And since they have nothing to prove, they don't have to flaunt their strength or use it to dominate others. Humility leads to meekness. And meekness is not weakness. Rather, it is strength under control, power used to build up rather than tear down.

The humble are not threatened either by God's greatness or the reflection of that greatness in the talents of others. In fact, this is what naturally catches their eye and absorbs their attention – the goodness of God, wherever it may be found.

The form of prayer that extols God's goodness is called **praise**. The activity that honors God's goodness in other people is called **affirmation**. The humble take delight in praising God and affirming people.



The reason the humble take the last place of honor at the table is not because they think ill of themselves, but because they are preoccupied with honoring others. And the reason people ask them to move higher is because they know this admirable attitude is rare. In fact it is actually divine. It is exactly the way the three Divine Persons relate to each other. The Father glorifies the Son, the Son glorifies the Father, and the Spirit is so preoccupied with glorifying the Father and the Son that most of us feel we really don't know much about Him.



“An attentive ear is a wise man's joy” (Sir 3:28). The humble are able to truly listen to another with genuine interest and delight in the other's goodness. The humble are the people who give you their undivided attention and make you feel special and appreciated. You love to have them around. You love to work hard for them. You cheer when they are honored.

The proud, on the other hand, are so self-absorbed that their conversations become monologues. When you are speaking, they are not listening. They are just thinking about what they are going to say next. Eventually you smile, yawn, and do your best to get away from them. You roll your eyes when they brag of their exploits. If you work for them, you do the minimum required while looking for a better job. So those who exalt themselves are ultimately left alone. But those who humble themselves gather a crowd of admirers.

When asked to name **the four Cardinal Virtues**, St. Bernard of Clairvaux replied “humility, humility, humility, and humility. He said this because the word “cardinal” means **“hinge.”** And everything hinges on humility. Humility opens the door to the hearts of others and to the heart of God.

This originally appeared in Our Sunday Visitor as a reflection on the Scripture readings for the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle C (Sirach 3:17-29, Psalm 68, Hebrews 12:18-24, and Luke 14: 1, 7-14). It is reproduced here by permission of the author.

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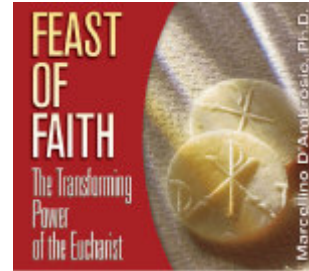
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