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22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time - 28 August 2022

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28 August 2022

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Joe Tedesco

Introduction

In first century Palestine, social status was markedly hierarchical – the higher one showed themselves to be in the hierarchy of things, the more worthwhile they were. Our social structures may not be so obviously hierarchical, but we still can mistakenly assume that God judges worth the same way we do. Our readings today remind us that the first in the kingdom are those who place themselves among the last in this world. These readings assist us in the focus today on Social Justice Sunday.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you humbled yourself even to death.
Lord, have mercy.

You have been exalted by the Father.
Christ, have mercy.

You call us all to follow you.
Lord, have mercy.

Collect

The oration

God of might, giver of every good gift,
put into our hearts the love of your name,
so that, by deepening our sense of reverence,
you may nurture in us what is good
and, by your watchful care,
keep safe what you have nurtured.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever

The central petition of the prayer is that God plants deep in our hearts the gift of love of the divine name. It is important to note that the theology of the divine name is not strong in our understanding, however in biblical texts the divine name denotes the reality and self-revelation of God. The love of believers is in response to their faith in the power of God over all things and in all things. This power is expressed in that unmitigated, bountiful goodness which is exemplified in the cosmic acts of creation, salvation and renewal, as well as in God's guidance and protection in their own lives.

Within the context of their love for God, we further ask for an increase in the quality of our observance of worship and practice of good works. Through this religious observance we seek that God will nourish the good that is in our hearts, especially the love for God which we have just petitioned. Connected with this petition is a prayer that God will enable us to persevere with zeal in what has been undertaken. God's power and goodness are trustworthy. They are the source of all that is good in the human heart, and so can be counted upon to provide the means for the nourishment and care of those good things.

In essence, zeal for God's name, heartfelt love, and constant and devout service, exist together in the lives of the Christian people, who recognise the power of God over all things working for their good. It is clear to see why this prayer has remained within our worship since the seventh century. (Gerard Moore)

First Reading

Ecclesiasticus 3:17–18, 20, 28–29

Sirach teaches the importance of humility. The greater you are, the more you need to humble yourself. It is the humble that are counted among the godly. Conversely, pride is like an insidious vice that blinds one to true worth.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 67:4-7, 10-11. R. cf. V. 11

God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.

Today's Psalm calls out in praise and hope in a God who lifts the humble, who is a protector of the vulnerable, who provides shelter to the homeless.

Second Reading

Hebrews 12:18–19, 22–24

These verses today are taken near the conclusion of the letter to the Hebrews. It exhorts its readers to recognise how blessed they are to be part of the 'new covenant' of Jesus. A covenant in which they are invited to participate in God's glory, to experience the joy of a heavenly Jerusalem.

Gospel Reading

Luke 14:1, 7–14

A Pharisee invites Jesus to dine with him. There he witnesses the guests attempting to establish their standing by jockeying for the seats of honour. Jesus uses this opportunity to teach on the importance of humility and that the honour offered by God is the only one worth seeking.

Reflection

Luke loves a good meal story. There are a number of them in the third Gospel and we have one such setting in today's readings. In today's Gospel scene, Jesus is dining with an important Pharisee. There Jesus talks of an even more special occasion being a wedding banquet.

Things have changed since Jesus' time, but we still have those special dinners and lunches, special occasions where the meal is part of a grander happening. A wedding celebration, an awards ceremony, a birthday party, or a formal dinner welcoming a head of state – there are any number of occasions that include a special meal. Most of us would be aware of such occasions and perhaps, at times at least, partake in them. One of the things that make such occasions different from other meals is that there are usually specially assigned seats. Often, there might be special places for guests of honour or, in the case of a wedding for example, a special place for key participants and their families. Many would have heard and perhaps even experienced firsthand the handwringing that can surround organising the placement of guests at a celebratory wedding meal. Worrying about who should be sitting with whom and where, afraid not to leave anybody out or offend. It is something of this sentiment sitting in the background of Luke's reading today.

In Jesus' day, most meals were occasions for making social statements of one kind or another even before a word was said. At whose residence one ate and who was present was a statement of what sort of social and even moral standing one had (cf. Luke 5:29-30). Where one sat served a similar purpose. To dine with one of note was to be seen as worthy of their standing, to sit closer to the 'head of the table' was to elevate the station of oneself even more. With that, Jesus' teaching seems pretty obvious to us. It appears a simple piece of wisdom echoing the first reading from Ben Sirach, do not seek to elevate yourself. Rather, be humble and it will save potential embarrassment in case you have to move which will announce to the world that you are not as morally upstanding and socially important as you think you are.

However, as the reading from Sirach indicates, there is more than simply avoiding a social *faux pas* at stake here. Ben Sirach warns the young person the teaching is directed at to find favour in God's eyes first and foremost. The pathway to that favour is to humble oneself, especially if one is of a higher standing in the first place.

Similarly, Jesus points out that if one develops the character of humility, of exalting the other above him or herself, it is the humble person who will be exalted. It echoes

similar teaching that we have heard in recent liturgies such as last week's; "there are those who are now last who will be first, and those now first who will be last" (Lk 13:30). It is simple enough on the face of it, but not so simple in the doing.

First there is the inherent logic that we need to lay aside. How can the first be last and last be first? If I guarantee my own wellbeing, status and all else, then I know I have that. If I actively seek to humble myself, I am necessarily going to give up what I know guarantees me standing. What sort of logic is that?

What is being asked of us with this 'upside down' measure that Jesus is proposing, as is often the case in the Gospels, is to take account of where our trust lies. Effectively Jesus is asking, 'who do you trust'? Do you trust your own capacity to find self-worth and esteem, or are you willing to lay that aside and trust God who truly knows you and who truly knows your worth? Are you willing to trust that God will ultimately value you more than anything, including yourself, ever could?

Next week we will hear Jesus ask his followers to 'take up your cross'. Today we get an introduction to what that actually means. For starters, it means taking on the burden of humility, of looking second best, or even worse. It means not having the best things, being in the best place and looking the most impressive. Of not chasing the acclaim and assuredness that comes with status and societal approval.

There is an added layer to the Gospel reading today. Because not only does Jesus encourage us toward humility using the motif of the guest at the special banquet, Jesus goes further and asks us to be a special type of host too.

When Jesus asks his listeners to invite the poor, the crippled the lame and the blind he is, in effect, asking us to humble ourselves further. In the social context of the day, Jesus is appearing to ask people to offer hospitality, inclusion, and love to those who, by rights according to custom, were not expected to receive such attention. To invite such people to a meal was to lower the standing of the entire household. In the case of the people mentioned, it even risked making the host unclean and, thus, rendered something of a pariah to others.

This is quite a challenge when we place that in our contemporary context. It is easy to associate with people like me, who I know will respond well to what I have to offer. In the context of our weekly Eucharistic feast, it is easy to associate with those who fit the part, who seem like they belong. There seems to be a call here to pay special attention to those who do not seem to fit the mould, who might even be considered beneath us.

So, it is not only us as individuals who are encouraged to develop the humble spirit, an emptying nature which leaves room for God to fill, but we are also encouraged to live in humble communities of faith, being welcoming to all, but especially welcoming to those whom society has deemed unworthy, to the needy and to those who can offer nothing in return. The closer we are to that place, the closer we are to encountering the only praise and honour that matters; that which comes from God.

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

God treasures the least among us and fulfils their needs so let us place these petitions in the knowledge that they will be answered according to God's will.

Petitions

We pray for the leaders of our church, particularly Pope Francis. May all our leaders increase their awareness that humility and service are what God asks of them.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for world leaders as they face the problems of war, famine, food insecurity, climate change and many other challenges. May they be humble in their leadership and exercise selflessness in all their judgements so that social justice may be evident.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our church in Australia that we will be strengthened by the work of the Plenary Council and be humbly aware of the Holy Spirit's work in our discernment, remembering that we are one church.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who work to bring social justice to the impoverished. May their humility and grace bring them the strength to work effectively among the poor.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our community gathered here that we will hear the gospel call to be humble. May we consciously increase our capacity to understand the need to work for social justice in every aspect of our lives by being conscious of the source of our material wants and careful to respect all the people we meet.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are suffering loss, ill health and abandonment. May we find ways to reach out and be missionaries in our own social context so that we can fulfill the gospel call.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

In faith and humility, we place all these needs before God in the sure knowledge that they will be answered through the power of the Spirit and in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOVK	GA	CWB	CWBII
Alive and aware		20			
As we gather at your table					451
Be thou my vision	9			733	455
Come down, O love divine	118		375	653	381
Come to me, all you who labour	37		228	660	470
Come to me			471		
For the healing of the nations			513		
Love divine, all loves excelling			463	740	552
Love is his word			462	743	553
My soul is longing for your peace				751	559
Sing to God, with joy and gladness					603
Tell out, my soul			550		213
The Beatitudes				817	456
Touch the earth lightly		34			631

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 67: *God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.*

	CWB	GA	JOBC	LPC
Psalm 67	414	46	pg. 90	pg. 136