

## 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time C

This is a story that appeared in *The Los Angeles Times*: There was a long line of airline passengers when they were told their flight had been canceled. Many were visibly upset. But one passenger became very impatient, pushed his way to the front of the line, and angrily demanded a first-class ticket on the next available flight. “I am sorry sir,” said the ticket agent, “you have to wait for your turn. There are many people ahead of you in line.” The angry passenger pounded his fist on the counter and yelled, “Do you have any idea who I am?” The person at the desk calmly picked up the public address microphone and said, “Attention please. There is a gentleman at the ticket counter who does not know who he is. If there is anyone who can identify him, please come to the counter.”

The common theme of today’s readings is the need for true humility and the blessedness of generosity. The first reading from the book of Sirach says, “My child, conduct your affairs with humility. Humble yourself, and you will find favor with God.” The Book of Sirach is a book of moral instructions written about 175 years before the time of Jesus. In the first reading, the author exhorts his readers to find true greatness in humility.

During the American Revolution, a man in civilian clothes drove past a group of soldiers who were busy pulling out a horse carriage stuck in deep mud. Their officer was shouting instructions to them without making any attempt to help. The stranger asked the officer why he was not helping. The officer said, “I am the Commander.” So the stranger got down from his horse and proceeded to help the exhausted soldiers himself. When the job was completed, he turned to the Commander and said, “Next time you need any help like this, do not hesitate to call me again.” Then he gave the commander his business card. The stranger was the Commander in Chief—General Washington.

The Gospel of today warns us against all forms of pride and self-glorification. If pride is the root cause of all evil, humility is the foundation for all virtues. To learn humility we need to first look at Jesus. Though he was God, he humbled himself to assume a human nature with all its weaknesses. He humbled himself to the point of washing the feet of his disciples and dying on the cross totally humiliated. Humility is not found in the dictionary of the culture we are living in. Our culture demands that a person get ahead at all costs. Climbing the social ladder, gaining name, and fame are the things to be admired. But Jesus calls us to a different direction. He calls us to a path of humility. In the gospel of today Jesus says, “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be exalted.” What the world puts before us as most admirable is not what is admirable before God. What is truly admirable is to be less concerned about being admired. The basis of the virtue of humility is the awareness that everything we have is a gift of God. Therefore, there is no reason to boast. Humility is the proper understanding of our own selves with our strengths and weaknesses. We must admit the truth of ourselves—that we do not know everything, that we can make mistakes, and that we are sinners. Thomas Hardy was a poet and a novelist. His literary skills were well known and anyone would publish his writings. But every time he sent in his writings to the publisher, he always enclosed a self-addressed envelope so that his article could be returned if it was rejected.

Leonard Bernstein, a very famous musician, was once asked which instrument was the most difficult to play. He promptly replied, “The second fiddle. I can get plenty of violinists, but to find someone who can play the second fiddle is a problem. And if we have no second fiddle, we have no harmony.” Humility is an attempt to see ourselves as God sees us. It is our ability to play that “second fiddle” as well. Our growth in virtue and holiness will not be harmonious without humility. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, Jesus humbles himself to be present to us in the form of bread and wine. We will see him when we humble our own selves like him.