

14th Ordinary Sunday A

Only a humble heart can praise God. Words of praise come easy to those who are humble. We need to praise God whether we are in good times or in bad, in sickness or in health, when our wallet is full or empty. There was a great preacher who went around from place to place preaching the word of God. His only income was the voluntary contributions of the congregation he preached to. One day, after preaching for an hour to a packed congregation, he passed his hat around. The hat made its round and came back empty. The preacher looked inside the hat and said, “Brethren, let us thank the Lord, for the hat has come back to me safely.”

In the gospel of today, we hear Jesus giving praise to the Father, “I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth.” He thanks God for revealing himself to the simple and the humble. Jesus was able to praise God because he himself was humble. Jesus himself says, “Come to me all you who labor and are burdened. I will give you rest. Take my yoke and learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart.” Meekness and humility are the characteristics of the children of God. There is humility in everyone who is truly great.

John Joseph Pershing was a general in the U.S. Army during World War I. One day, he was on a leisurely walk on the grounds of the Military Academy at West Point, smoking a cigarette. Close by, there were two cadets trimming a hedge. One of them was a new arrival to the Academy and did not know General Pershing. When he saw him smoking a cigarette, he went over to him and said, “Hey buddy, how about a cigarette?” The general gave him a cigarette and lighted it for him. The lad thanked him, went back to the hedge, and found his companion looking at him horrified. His friend asked him, “Man, do you know who he is? He is General Pershing.” The new cadet was frightened. He ran to the general and apologized. The general patted him on his back and said, “I appreciate your courage. You will make a good soldier. My only advice is never to try this on a lieutenant.”

People who are truly great are also humble. Those who throw their weight around are mediocre or subordinates. G.K Chesterton says, “There is no one big who has never felt small. Some never feel small because they are really small.” Jesus did not just teach us about humility. But he asked us to look and learn from him. He said, “Learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart.” The root of humility is self-knowledge—knowing our strengths and weakness. It is realizing that we are created by God and that we depend on him. It is acknowledging that we owe everything to God. The humble feel a deep indebtedness to God. Feeling that gratitude is one of the qualities of a good steward. St. Augustine says, “Humility is the love of God to the disdain of self, and pride is the love of self to the disdain of God.”

Considering the times we are in, maybe many of us could practice humility by wearing a mask. The state has made it mandatory for all indoor spaces. Rules imposed from outside will always meet resistance, but the ones that come from within as a result of conversion of mind and heart will not be a burden. It should not be the political issue that, unfortunately, it has become. We should leave all politics at the door as we come into church. Maybe we should change the focus from ourselves to others. Many of us may not be concerned about our health. I think this is the time to think of others and ask, “What can I do to keep my brothers and sisters, and my neighbors healthy so that they feel safe to join me around the altar?” If you can do four things, we will have this pandemic under control: Pray, wear a mask, maintain social distancing, and wash your hands frequently. If we take care of these things, we will avoid another shutdown. I want the churches to remain open. So let us do our share. Without humility, we cannot unite ourselves with Christ. And being united with him, our burdens become lighter. He gives us the grace to carry our burdens. In Jesus, we also will find rest and peace. Let us take our troubles and sorrows to Jesus. He can give us the joy and peace that no one else can give.