

Homily
August 28, 2022
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
34:00 – 42:53

There are two threads that tie our readings closely together. One thread passes through all three: First, Second and Gospel. The other thread through First Reading and Gospel. Those threads are “humility” and “almsgiving.”

We’ll start with humility. But first let’s talk about “dirt.” Dirt. Dirt has a lot of different names in English, words that describe it. The rich dirt that really grows things well is known as “loam.” It’s dark. It’s rich. It’s full of minerals.

Another name for that same kind of dirt is, “humus.” H-U-M-U-S. Not *hummus*. Humus. And it is the root word, or shares the root word with “human.” Because as we know from Genesis, we come from dirt. Right? Remember Ash Wednesday: *Remember you are dirt and unto dust you shall return.*

We are a part of creation. It is a gift of God. He gave us life and he’s blown his very life Spirit into our beings. And we started out as dirt.

There’s another word that shares with humus and human – humility. Humility is that virtue by which one recognizes one’s origin as creature and one’s giftedness by the Creator.

Now we all know that God created us and he created us “good.” We kind of mess it up sometimes. But we are to assess ourselves first as creature and in thankfulness for what we have been given – not only life, but our talents, our skills; and then remember that we didn’t create these. Oh, we worked with them, yes. But they were a gift first and foremost and others have helped us develop them over the years. From parents to grandparents to aunts, uncles, teachers, professors, skilled laborers who showed us “how to do it,” we became proficient. Why? Because in all humility they helped it happen.

So when we hear the word, “humility,” it’s not meant for us to grovel and roll around in the dirt (even if we are dirt), but rather to be thankful. Thankful to God for his gift to us and thankful to all those who have made it possible and continue to encourage us in what we have. And know that we have shortcomings and sin, and yet God has given us that remedy that we need.

We are dirt and that’s a good thing.

That shoots through very clearly in Sirach. “Humble yourself,” the writer of Sirach tells his son, “all the more, especially if you are great.”

The Gospel has a clear message about humility when it comes to “meal.” That’s the setting. The setting where people are jostling and pushing and knocking each other over, trying to get to the best place. Jesus makes it very clear – that’s NOT humility.

Humility is to realize in this case, don’t presume anything. Just go have a seat and wait. No matter how important you are, go have a seat and wait.

And in the Second Reading, that wonderful description of the power of Christ coming into the world and making it possible for us to be saved...it ends in that wonderful line with the sprinkling of blood. And we know what that blood was, the ultimate act of humility. (gesturing toward the Crucifix) The Word was made flesh and came among us. Not only among us, but died for us by shedding his blood. Yes. That One continues to show us the way.

The second thread: Almsgiving.

The son of Sirach is told, “Be sure you give alms.” Why? “They atone for sins.” And very often the sins that we know of are when we have let others fall short. Or encourage them to fall short. Or even push them into it. He says, “No. Remember alms for those in need, just like you need.”

And again the meal setting – Jesus urges those who are able invite not just their buddies, not just their favorites, not just those who know they’re going to pay you back – which was part of the ancient culture of food and meals in the First Century, not only in the Roman culture, but as well as in the Jewish culture. They had groups, special groups. No. He says let’s break that down.

There are those who need to be fed. They are the ones who are hungry, yes. But also the lame, the mute...anyone who has “less than” of some kind. No. Feed them first. Sit down with them. Remember “sit down” in the first part? Sit. Just take a seat. Don’t wait to be someone special. Take a seat and welcome those who hunger and thirst.

I’d like to urge all of us to take up at least one of these threads in our life this week. Take the thread of humility, or the thread of almsgiving. See how it weaves into your life, my life. How does it bind us as one? For we are all dirt and unto dirt we will return. But we are also in that Christ, who in the ultimate humbleness took on our life and gave us resurrection hope.

