

Proper 17 C
St. Luke 14:1, 7-14
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St. George's Bolton
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Humility

"For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Before I begin, let me offer up my credentials. I am one of the most humble people you will ever meet, so I know whereof I speak. When I look at other folks, I think to myself, "I'm more humble than they are!" I have a lifetime of experience being humble.

And let me tell you, I have much to be humble about! I am proud of my humility. I am so humble, that both the pie and oil companies have asked to put my face on their products! [That would be the Humble Pie Company and the Humble Oil Company of Texas] I am so humble, I have renamed my condo, "my Humble Abode."

Someone recently quoted for me a wise statement the former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir once made: *"Don't be humble, you're not that great!"* But if we're going to quote famous people, I feel the same way as Muhammad Ali, as he once said, *"When you're as great as I am, it's hard to be humble."* Truly, I can speak from experience on this one, *it's a lot of work being humble!*

My protestations and false humility aside, Jesus teaches us an important lesson this morning: *"don't think more highly of*

yourself than you really are." Humility is always appropriate because all we have, our gifts, our talents, our treasure, our opportunities, are all gifts and grace from God. What we have accomplished, we have accomplished through and because of God. We need to give God the credit when we start to feel as though it is all our doing! Because it is all but by the *Grace* of God: every breath we take. Being humble merely acknowledges the truth, and it is always best to live truthfully.

Humility is taking a measure of the truth and seeing yourself as you really are: *utterly dependent upon God*, minute by minute. We might like to think otherwise, but to our own peril.

Living with humility is a good thing. When you claim responsibility for your success, others will hold you not only accountable for the flaws in your success, but also for your failures. Pride is a heavy mantle to carry about. It is so heavy it can completely crush you.

The advice in today's Gospel seems to make sense: Don't put yourself in a place of embarrassment by claiming the better seat or reward until you know you have *earned* it. Even then, one might wonder, is it worth it to claim credit in your own pride? Better to take the low seat, and then to be asked to move up higher. Better to be safe than shamed and sorry. Many people may try to humble you, but only you can allow yourself to be *humiliated*!

The only pride we should have in our accomplishments is the satisfaction that we did our best and that the journey to the goal was a rewarding and satisfying one that fulfills our purpose in life.

We may worry about who gets to sit at the head table at a banquet, or how close we are sitting to the bride and groom at a wedding ceremony, but such concerns are fickle and very flawed: indicators of a fragile ego and likely, very low self esteem to need such temporal indicators of your worth. Is it really worth a competition to show how important you are by how close you are sitting to the wedding couple? Should you really feel slighted, since after all, *you were invited* to be there? But Jesus is talking about a lot more than saving yourself an embarrassment at some testimonial or wedding dinner, isn't he? Humility is a quality that is held up for us throughout the scriptures, with many references to it in the Old and New Testaments.

Why, do you suppose, is *humility* so important?

Jesus spoke volumes about humility in word and by how He presented Himself to us, literally in his deeds. How He presented Himself reveals the nature of God the Father also. If God can be humble, what business do we have being proud?

Pride goeth before the fall. Pride is the root of much evil. Our society exalts ego and pride. It rewards pride with success. Look at who we think are successful: movie stars and politicians because they are in People Magazine and in the press. It is appropriate that the N.Y. Times had a headline recently, calling one politician, "*Drunk on His Own Notoriety.*" [It was written about the actor Vincent Cassel from a French film that came out in 2010- and not about Donald Trump!]

Pride grows out of a fear we are not good enough. But God made each one of us and we *are* each one of us good enough for God! It may take a while to come around to believing that truth, but this is a truth, if we come to accept it, which can heal us of the disease of pride.

False humility is especially troubling. Humility is like a pair of underwear: if it's showing, it's really not appropriate. It is comical. It is a mask worn to defend against further humiliation. It is an admission our pride is not justified.

How about *wounded pride*...or as we sometimes call it shame. This happens when you learn something you believed in the imagination of your mind to be true about yourself *is not true*, and never will be true about yourself. Wounded pride often fractures friendships and even family bonds. We suppose that wounded pride entitles us to dismiss the offending party from our lives, even if doing so is not that easy. Is such pride worth separating us from friends and family, as it often does in real practice? This kind of pride comes at a high cost. How many broken relationships fell victim to unforgiving pride over some small slight we have magnified into a cause-*celeb* to alienate our affections from others?

The author of Ecclesiasticus said: *"How can dust and ashes be proud?...The beginning of human pride is to forsake the Lord; the heart has withdrawn from its maker. For the beginning of pride is sin and the one who clings to it pours out abominations."*

[Ecclesiasticus 10:7-18]

Entitlement and her children are among these abominations. Pride, which separates you from God and other mortals, is an abomination fertile for all sorts of sin. Feeling as though you are better than others or deserve special treatment because of your supposed status, is not only foolish, but it is evil.

We are but dust- a grain of sand as on the beach. As the author of Ecclesiasticus said, *'how can dust and ashes be*

proud? We are one of billions of stars in the sky, and one of billions of grains of sand on the beach. Yet God knows us intimately and loves each one of us. Every grain of sand, every star is special and unique to God, and no better, no worse, and not loved more than any of the billions of others. God sent his only Son into the world that this truth might be revealed to us. And this is *the* truth. And living with it will set you free.

What, do you suppose, is important at the end of life in your last days and hours? What do *you* think? Is it pride or truth? I don't think we lie on our death-beds, parsing out our last few breaths, while defending our pride. *How can dust be proud?*

Then there is the Law of Gravity: *what goes up, must come down*. There is no denying this law, and there is no way around it. The higher our human pride rises, the greater the fall back to earth. And no matter how high the orbit we place ourselves in, everyone of us is mortal, and unto earth and dust we must return. That is the humbling truth.

The Psalmist said long ago: "*The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. ...Behold, you look for truth deep within me and will make me understand wisdom secretly.*" The Psalmist mapped out a way to live in truth, which has been prayed down through the centuries, offering a humble heart instead of a proud, self-justifying heart; not a heart that acts like an entitled martyr instead of a contrite and humble sinner. The author of the Psalms was a humble person, because in many of the Psalms he speaks the truth he has come to see about himself and his own life, a truth, which when we are humble, we can come to grasp with him.

Humility is important because when we are humble we live as who we really are to our fullest potential and we are free of the shackles of pride and vanity which destroy not only the soul, but our relationships with other people. We live authentically.

Why is humility so important? Because the truth is important. Because knowing the truth in your head and in your heart is vital to your survival and to the new life you seek. It is vital to know *who* you are and *whose* you are. We don't belong to ourselves. In Baptism we belong to Christ Jesus.

To be humble is to know yourself and your gifts, but most importantly, the source and reason for those gifts.

Hear the invitation to live humbly uttered by our Lord:
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:29 AMEN