

The 2011 Canadian World Junior Hockey Squad had a motto...a team slogan that they used to focus on the game at hand: "Stay humble, Respect your opponent."

That slogan, stay humble, can also help us in our spiritual life. St Bernard of Clairvaux answers when asked what are the three most important virtues for the spiritual life, "Humility, Humility, Humility." The great spiritual masters all make sure to include the virtue of humility as the foundation of the spiritual life. Fr. Garrigou Lagrange writes that humility is the foundation of the spiritual life because it counters the vice of pride, usually the beginning of every sin. Today, Our Lord is giving us a lesson on humility, where greatness is measured by concern for others and a modest estimation of ourselves. Humility is always with respect to someone...first to God and then to our neighbour.

With respect to God, humility is recognizing our littleness, our poverty and thus glorifying God producing within us an attitude of gratitude. It is recognizing that everything that we have...everything that we are, we have received from God and giving thanks for those gifts.

It might sound harsh, but the truth about ourselves in relation to God is that we are nothing. We read in St Teresa of Avila's spiritual work the *Interior Castle*, "God is Sovereign Truth and to be humble is to walk in truth, for it is absolutely true to say that we have no good thing in ourselves, but only misery and nothingness; and anyone who fails to understand this is walking in falsehood." As St Catherine of Sienna prayed, "God, you are all and I am nothing."

This sounds harsh to our ears because it puts us in our place...it goes against the grain of the mindset of society that desires to be god, that desires to be at the centre of attention, "it's all about me" as Nordstrom advertises "You First"...to take the higher seat at the banquet because of some status given by society because of money or popularity. The truth that we are nothing in relation to God puts our ego in check. When we practice the virtue of humility, we recognize that we are not god, and we put Christ at the centre of our lives knowing that by His providence, we have received everything, including our wealth and popularity. In staying humble, we put Him first, not ourselves.

With respect to our neighbour, humility is exercised in generous charitable giving. When we exercise generosity, we must avoid any trace of vain glory or seeking of human reward: our primary focus should be on God from whom we have received everything. That is why our Lord teaches that when we have a dinner, we should invite not those who can return the favour with another dinner, but those who can not give anything in return.

But how do we understand the second, humility with respect to others, without comparing ourselves to others? And this is a big problem in the workforce...especially in business. Trying to climb the so-called corporate ladder. Humility in the world is seen as something negative...to be devoid of ambition, nobility and unworthy of honor. So we make the

distinction: we see humility with respect to others not as a comparison with others, but recognizing what is of God in others.

Think of the modern example of St Theresa of Calcutta. I think we can all agree that she was a humble person. She knew who she was with respect to God...as creature before the Creator. However, in her service to the poorest of the poor, she served God in others...she humbled herself to serve God in the other. It is what separated her from being a mere social worker.

The challenge for us then, is to always be on guard against false humility. False humility leads to being a bad steward of God's gifts of time, talent and treasure. It is the pitfall of many who think they are being humble but actually are not doing themselves, God or others any justice. Essentially, the humble man sees himself as he really is. He acknowledges his weaknesses...he acknowledges his strengths. St Thomas Aquinas writes, "To despise the gifts that God has given is not due to humility, but to ingratitude."

In the Eucharistic banquet to which we have been invited at every Holy Mass, we see the virtue of humility in the tiny white host, the Blessed Sacrament. In that tiny white host, Our Saviour veils his glory, his grandeur and splendour in bread and wine and gives Himself to us, who cannot repay this great act of love. We should learn from this Sacrament how to be humble...how to stay humble.