

22nd Ordinary Sunday
September 1, 2019
“The Truth Behind Our Motives”

Sir 3:17...29
Heb 12:18...24
Lk 14:1...14

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

We all need to be secure – we all need food, clothing, and shelter. We also need to be loved – we need healthy relationships, friendships, and intimacy of some kind. We also need to be esteemed – we need respect from others, status, recognition, and personal freedom. Only then, can we become self-actualized – Only then can we become the fully developed human being that we were created to be!

One of the serious problems that so many face is to attempt to achieve any of these needs in the wrong way. And the best way that we can determine whether we are doing this is to examine our personal motives.

We can do something good and worthwhile – but with the wrong motivation and goal. We can even fail to do something we should – because of some misguided motivation. This is particularly evident in the area of our self-esteem. We do this even though other people will see through us to our true motives. They can see this even if we do not see it ourselves! And, unfortunately for us, they understand that we are not all that we want them to think we are.

Consequently, we dislike those who brag – those who inflate themselves – those who are condescending or patronizing – those who distort the truth, those who try to manipulate our opinion of them.

Fortunately, the readings for today have much to say about all of this. All the readings counsel humility – which, for the disciple, – is honesty and truth with ourselves and before God!

Ben Sirach was a wise and learned teacher in Israel 200 years or so before the time of Jesus. He had traveled far and wide – and studied other cultures, customs, behaviors, and beliefs. He took what was truly wise and best, of all that he learned, and integrated it into his teaching about truly Godly behavior. His message today is powerful.

“Conduct all your affairs with humility and you will be loved. The more you humble yourselves, the greater you will be in the eyes of others and in the mind of God. Use the gifts and talents God has given you for others and for God. Above all, don’t try to be someone you were never meant to be!”

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus gives a marvelous teaching on motivation and esteem. Place and position at a Hebrew banquet had strict rules of protocol. (There were not name cards at places like we have today.) The closer you were to the host, the more favored you were supposed to be. This is the reason the guests struggled for the higher places. Apparently, this often back-fired – to the embarrassment of the guest, himself!

Then Jesus challenges their motivation for doing things. Like the Romans, the wealthy Jews would help out or do special things for other wealthy people. They did this in the hope that their help or gifts would be reciprocated when they, themselves, experienced hardship. However, they did not reach out to or help the poor or others who were disadvantaged in any way – because these folks could never pay them back.

Consequently, Jesus tells them how important it is to do things for those who are poor, overlooked, and even disdained – to people who can never make a return. Because God knows our true motives – and God will repay us when we stand before Him after death!

Brothers and Sisters, God is the only one who can ever, ultimately, fulfill us and bring us the everlasting security, the unconditional love, and the esteem we so ardently seek in this life. Just knowing this and striving for this will always purify our motivation in all that we do.

The Letter to the Hebrews has much to teach us in this regard. The Lord our God has not revealed Himself to us as He did to the Chosen People at Mt. Sinai. We can approach God! We can reach out to God! We can even touch God! Because God has come to us in the person of Jesus, His Son – the God-Man!

Furthermore, Jesus is the mediator between the Godhead and ourselves. Jesus took our flesh, lived our life, dreamed our dream, felt our pain, experienced our struggle – and even underwent torture and an excruciating death! Thus, we are already valued, esteemed, and loved by God. We have only to live like we are truly His children in honesty and truth in return.

Let us pray that we come closer to this reality each day!

Amen.

September 1, 2019

Msgr. Russell G. Terra

