

# The Catholic Parish of Petworth & Midhurst West Sussex

Fr Peter's Homily for The Twenty Second Sunday of Ordinary Time  
(Year C)  
28<sup>th</sup> August 2022

On first reading, this Gospel story looks like some straightforward secular life-coaching: don't claim a high position in case you have to face the embarrassment of being told to go lower – much better to make yourself look good by being invited up higher. In itself that is good enough advice, but the Lord is not in the business of giving secular life-coaching advice, so there must be more to it than that. He never speaks without his words being an invitation to travel deeper into reality, deeper into the heart of God, so we need to look at this a bit harder.

The Lord is at a Sabbath Day meal in the house of a leading Pharisee. A sick man is brought in, and Jesus heals him. The other guests are seething, but dare not say anything because clearly the compassion of Christ has won the argument over whether or not to heal on the Sabbath. And into this seething annoyance, Jesus speaks these words. He is inviting the other guests with him to take a journey into humility. Humility is not just about refusing to think of ourselves as better than others; it is also about refusing to say 'I am so much worse' – it is, in fact, about refusing all comparisons and simply saying 'I am me, the person God made me to be, I gladly accept the gifts that he has given me and I will use them, to the best of my abilities, as any given situation requires'.

Humility does not require us to say 'I am worthless'. It does, however, require us to accept that God has given us certain gifts which are to be discerned by each of us, and then used generously as the circumstances require. Those gifts do not make me any more important, or any better, than anyone else, they are just gifts that need to be used for the common good.

Humility invites us to see ourselves as God sees us – and in doing so it requires us to accept, honestly, that we are not yet what we were created to be. Humility drives us to work more and more to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. The proud person will act very differently – what need have they to change, they are good enough already?

Humility also punctures the illusion of our self-sufficiency. The proud person believes that they can manage perfectly well on their own, they have no need of God. In falling into this trap they deprive themselves of many precious things. The person who thinks they have life sorted will never see the opportunities for growth and change set out before them – such things are not necessary for them. They stand alone, tall and proud while the icy winds batter them and buffet them. But the humble person knows that they cannot manage alone, they know that they are dependent on God, and so they experience something that the proud person will never know: the humble person knows what it is like to be sheltered, protected and kept safe by the love of God. As the proud person freezes in the cold wind of their own self-sufficiency, the humble person is kept warm and sheltered in the love of God, because they know that they need him.

Each of us is unique. Each of us carries a unique combination of gifts given to us by our Creator. To the proud man these gifts are to his own credit, they make him feel important and pleased

with himself, and in the hands of such a proud person the gifts of God turn to dust. To the humble person these gifts provide opportunities, but they do not make him or her any more or less important than everyone else. They are just a part of the way in which God creates each of us as unique. While the proud person says 'How can I make myself look good with these gifts' the humble person will be saying 'How does God need me to use my gifts'. One has God at the centre of his world, the other has himself there instead. They could not be more different.

We often perceive pride as a sort of armour that keeps us safe, whereas it is, in fact a weakness that leaves us very vulnerable. The proud person depends on praise from people around them, and so they are vulnerable to telling people what they want to hear. They are unable to bear criticism, which seems to them an attack on their very selves, and so they are vulnerable to being unable to grow through criticism, and so they remain stunted. They need the buzz of praise and so they are vulnerable to having to do more and more extreme things to get attention. They have placed themselves at the centre of the world, and this leaves them vulnerable to living a life that is less than human as no person can bear such a weight of expectations. It is, in fact, much safer to be humble. To say 'Here I am, this is me, there are some gifts that God has given me and, although I am not always good at using them, I want to place them at his service: glory be to him, and not to me'.

Writing about what a humble life might look like, Dag Hammarskjöld wrote:

*"Praise and blame, the winds of success and adversity, blow over such a life without leaving a trace or upsetting its balance."*

To the truly humble person there is nothing to lose, and so they will always live a happier and more fulfilled life than the proud, however much we might kick against this inconvenient truth.