

The word humility is not popular these days. People wrongly think of it as being a doormat for somebody, or having low self-esteem. It's neither. Humility literally means "from the earth," that we're grounded, that we know our strengths and our weaknesses, that we understand our limits.

Humility is a vital part of our relationship with God. In a vision to St. Theresa of Avila, God said "True humility is to know what you can do, and what I can do." It's remembering that we are not God and we are dependent on him, which we do when we pray. It makes room for us to be filled with God, not just ourselves.

Humility is so essential in the kingdom of God that Jesus teaches us two lessons about it in today's Gospel: (1) decide to be humble, be intentionally humble; and then he gives a practical application of it, (2) show humility by helping people who can't reciprocate.

First, when Jesus says in the Gospel to take a lower seat of honor at the table, and then you might be moved up, he's not telling us to fake it; he's not giving us a strategy to win others' admiration. He's saying this is the behavior of someone who has intentionally decided to be humble. Humility isn't doing humble things; it's a conscious decision you make, it's an orientation to life before you act.

God wants us to be our best, to use the talents he gave us, with humility. That means we can recognize our accomplishments and at the same time recognize we are not self-made, that we've been given gifts all along that have helped us get things done. Without taking away any credit from our achievements, we recognize God as the source of our gifts and also give God credit for them. And we don't look down on others who don't have our gifts. We can acknowledge what we're good at – and give God some recognition, too.

The second lesson Jesus teaches us arises out of the situation he's in. When people had dinner parties in Jesus's day, the invitation came with an expectation that it would be reciprocated. So Jesus shocks his host when he says invite guests who can't reciprocate, who have only themselves to offer; mix with people of lower social status – and then God will repay you at the resurrection for your graciousness.

Jesus is telling his followers: don't get caught up in the social status game. He's teaching that our generosity has to be humble, and extend beyond our family and friends, and include people in need, people who have nothing to offer but themselves. God invites everyone to the heavenly feast. Our acceptance into that banquet depends on our acceptance of others now. We're responsible to help other people get into the heavenly banquet.

Let's decide to be humble, and to use our gifts without expectations of others. Deciding to be humble is liberating in so many ways: we stop being preoccupied with what other people think of us, or offending them, or being concerned about society's expectations of how we should be living (which is often not living by God's higher values).

And humility liberates us from ourselves: we stop grasping for acceptance and recognition. Jesus reminds us that the only person whose opinion of us really counts is God. Humble Christians are in God's loving hands, with nothing to lose. And we get

peace from struggling with our inadequacy. We can admit we don't know everything, we don't have to insist on doing things our way, and we can serve others without any expectations.

So this week, let's be a neighbor to someone who can't pay us back. And go for a day without talking about ourselves; learn what else there is to talk about.

Humility is an attitude and a tool for making progress in our spiritual lives. Decide to be humble. It will save us a lot of time in the Confession line.

Fr. John Ozella, Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, September 1, 2019