

Humble before the Lord

I. A LOOK AT THE THREE READINGS

FIRST READING (Sir 3:17-18, 20, 28-29)

¹⁷My son, conduct your affairs with **humility**,/ and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts./
¹⁸**Humble** yourself the more, the greater you are,/ and you will find mercy in the sight of God./ * ^{e20}For great is the power of the Lord;/ by the **humble** he is glorified./²⁸When the proud are afflicted, there is no cure;/ for they are offshoots of an evil plant./ ²⁹The mind of the wise appreciates proverbs,/ and the ear that listens to wisdom rejoices.^h

THE FOCUS: **Humility**

COMMENTARY

- The text comes from a wisdom literature. The book is one of the deuterocanonical books of the OT.
- V.17 exhorts the ordinary person to be humble in doing one's initiatives.
- V.17b gives the reason why: you will be loved more (by God or by the people).
- Humility makes one more loveable.
- A humble active person is more loveable than giver of gifts.
- A giver of gifts may be loved because one gives gifts. But one is not loved as much as a humble person who performs for the good of others.
- V.18 encourages the person not just to be humble, but to be more humble.
- V.18b gives the reasons why: the person becomes greater, one will find favor....
- V.20 is another exhortation in parallel form: *seek not what is too sublime // search not into things beyond your strength.*
- V.20 says "do not become too ambitious." Do not handle things beyond your capacity, intelligence, etc. Know yourself.



- Why? The Reading does not give a reason. We have to figure it out: *Not to be frustrated, disappointed.*
- V.28 talks about the happiness of a sage // wise man. His happiness is proverbs (food for thought) and attentive ear (listening ear).
- V.29 seems to be related with humility. Water (sign of humility) put down flaming fire (ambition, arrogance).
- The movement of water is to go down, while that of fire is to go up.
- Alms are effective means to atone for sins. Alms may represent conducting affairs with humility.

REFLECTIONS

The text is strong on humility. It invites everyone to be humble. Each one should exercise his God-given talent with humility.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 68:4-5, 6-7, 10-11)
**GOD, IN YOUR GOODNESS,
YOU HAVE MADE A HOME FOR THE POOR.**

SECOND READING (Heb 12:18-19, 22-24a)

Part I

^{18*} You have not **approached** that which could be touched* and a blazing fire and gloomy darkness and storm ^{19m}and a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words such that those who heard begged that no message be further addressed to them,

Part II

^{22p}No, you have **approached** Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, ^{23q}and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven,* and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect, ^{24r}and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently* than that of Abel.

THE FOCUS: What (Whom) the Christians Approach

COMMENTARY

What the Christians have approached

- Vv.18-19 recall of the exodus event on **Mt. Sinai**.
- There was theophany. (blazing fire = lightning)
- (darkness = smoke)
- (trumpet blast = thunder)
- God speaking = God whom the Israelites feared to hear. They were trembling.
- They did not like to hear him. Instead they assigned Moses to do it for them.
- Lucky are the Christians, for they did not experience terrible things in order to encounter the Lord.

What the Christians have not approached

- V.22 recalls the heavenly **city of Jerusalem** (Mt. Zion), a very different place, where Christians have approached.
- The place is heaven, where there is gathering of angels and assembly of the firstborn, where God is there (v.23).
- Jesus too is there, the mediator of a new covenant, whose blood is more effective than that of Abel (v.24).

REFLECTIONS

The Reading assures that Christians approach heaven (*city of God, heavenly Jerusalem*). In heaven, we find angels, the first borns, God and Jesus himself.

GOSPEL READING (Lk 14:1,7-14)

Setting (Sabbath, dining) Jesus being observed

^{1*}“On a sabbath he went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, and the people there were observing him carefully.^b

The story is introduced by an important word “Sabbath.” Here we would expect a controversy about the “sabbath,” but the author does not follow it up. Instead, he introduces something else. It is about choosing places where you do not incur embarrassment.

Jesus observing

Jesus the observed becomes the observer and he teaches the guests. He has got the nerve to do it. Who is he? For him those choosing places of honor is an issue. They have got the nerve to reserve places for themselves without being mindful of others who might be more dignified according to the host.

Through a parable, Jesus teaches them humility.

The Parable

^{7*} He told a parable to those who had been **invited**, noticing how they were choosing the places of honor at the table.

It does not sound like a parable, but a fraternal advice.

The Advice to the Guest: Negative

^{8g}“When you are **invited** by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline at table in the place of honor. A more distinguished guest than you may have been **invited** by him, ⁹and the host who **invited** both of you may approach you and say, ‘Give your place to this man,’ and then you would proceed with embarrassment to take the lowest place.

To recline at a banquet is a big honor. But do not anticipate such a place. Wait to be seated, to be safe, to be sure. Do not consider yourself so high. Otherwise, you will be embarrassed.

Maybe choosing places of honor was allowed by the Pharisees. It was logical thing to do for them being respected religious leaders.

For Jesus, it is not the right thing to do. The community he wants to establish is not a club or an association but a fraternity animated by his example of humility (incarnation, kenosis).

The Positive Advice

¹⁰Rather, when you are **invited**, go and take the lowest place so that when the host comes to you he may say, ‘My friend, move up to a higher position.’ Then you will enjoy the esteem of your companions at the table. ^{11h}For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Mindfully and intentionally, go to the lowest place. There is no lower place than the lowest.

You gain respect and esteem from others by

consciously humbling yourself, not by thinking you are highly favored by the host.

Give your host the liberty / pleasure to promote / upgrade you in the sight of others.

Advice to the host (Negative and Positive)

¹²Then he said to the host who **invited** him, “When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not **invite** your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, in case they may **invite** you back and you have repayment. ¹³Rather, when you hold a banquet, **invite** the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; ¹⁴blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Who is Jesus who gives unsolicited advice to the host?

Invitations before had strings attached. Meals were means to solidify relationships. The ones invited should invite in return.

Here Jesus tries to liberate himself and other people from this circuit. The host should throw parties without selfish agenda.

Invite those who cannot reciprocate. That is the best test for true self-giving.

Nothing will be lost. You will be rewarded anyway in the next life.

THE FOCUS: What to do when being invited/ when inviting

REFLECTIONS

In the Gospel text, Jesus teaches us to be unassuming. Even if we come from high positions, we should not position ourselves highly in social functions.

II. TYING THE THREE READINGS TOGETHER TO DEVELOP YOUR HOMILY/SHARING

The First Reading teaches us to be humble, not seeking anything beyond our capacity. The Second Reading teaches that (humble) Christians have a better destiny than the Israelite people. The Gospel Reading teaches us to be humble and not to expect reciprocation when doing a favor.

How to develop your sharing/homily

Relate your experience in a party, when you were transferred to another (lower) seat. How did you feel? The Readings talk about humility, being humble.

The First Reading explicitly advises doers to do their projects and tasks, their initiatives with humility.

Each one should know oneself. One must do only what one can do. One should not pretend to know more or better.

In the community, a humble servant is preferred to a benefactor giving dole outs. Better be a quiet worker than an arrogant benefactor who would like to dictate later on.

The Gospel Reading follows up the message of the First Reading. In a concrete context of meals and wedding banquets, Jesus boldly presents unsolicited advice to guests and to the host. The guests, even if they are special guests, should display some humility. They must not presume to be very special to the host. The host may have a more special guest whom you do not know.

Each one should know one's rightful place in the community. You do not presume you are “malakas” (have a pull) to the host.

To gain favor from the host, always start from below otherwise you will be embarrassed.

Another unsolicited advice for the host: one should invite the poor, the crippled... those who can not pay back, invite back, to free oneself from hidden or self-serving agenda.

The poor just come to eat without “observing” the movements of Jesus.

They are good guests. They have no hidden agenda. They do not attempt to occupy places of honor. They know where they should be.

The Second Reading portrays the final destiny of the Christians who have exercised humility in all their endeavors.

True and humble Christians are destined to stay in the heavenly Jerusalem where they participate in the life of God, Jesus and the angels in their heavenly banquet, where there is no more problem with sitting arrangement.

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III. OUR CONTEXT

1. Recall the moments when you had a humbling experiencing. What was the lesson you learned?

2. Why should Christians be aware of the virtue of humility?

3. How do we practice humility in a situation when many mandated organizations and religious groups want to be the number one group in the parish? -HM