



Preaching National Marriage Sunday – February 9, 2025

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8

Responsorial Psalm 136: 1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 7-8 (1c)

1 Corinthians 15: 1-11

Luke 5: 1-11

Today, we celebrate the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time and National Marriage Week.

The readings from sacred scripture are bound by three powerful yet different examples of the virtue of humility. What is a virtue? "A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good."¹

One way to understand the virtue of humility is *not thinking little of oneself but of thinking of oneself very little*. This definition of humility is not just a play on words but speaks to an attitude and orientation in life.

The first reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah had a vision of the majesty of the Lord's glory surrounded by His angels. In his vision, Isaiah immediately became aware of the great divide between the holiness of God and his sinfulness. Standing before the Lord God of heaven and earth, he felt the full weight of his unworthiness to look upon the Lord and live. Because of his humility, God commanded an angel to touch his lips with an ember from the altar. After placing the ember on Isaiah's lips, the seraph said, "*Your wickedness is purged, and your sins are forgiven.*" By this experience of God's gift of healing mercy, Isaiah experienced the unmerited goodness of God. The responsorial psalm captures his joy, "In the sight of the angels, I will sing your praises, Lord."

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), 443.

When God asked the question, "*Who will we send?*" Isaiah unabashedly, without hesitancy, shouts, "*Here I am, send me.*" In this singular act, Isaiah became the inspirational prophet of hope, who foretold the coming of the Messiah.

In his Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul humbly used himself, despite his unworthiness, as an example of Christ's salvific love at work in him, gained through Christ's death on the cross and resurrection. Paul tells them that he was a "*persecutor of the Church of God, the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle.*" His old self was gone. Paul had become a new man because of Jesus Christ's healing grace. His conversion led him to become an evangelist to the Gentiles.

In the Gospel of Luke, we have another example of humility. St. Peter heard Jesus teaching the crowd from a boat along the seashore. He was probably tending to his nets as he listened to Jesus. At Jesus' command, he does what seems like a waste of time by lowering his net. His openness and willingness to put his trust in Jesus led to a miraculous catch of fish.

As an experienced fisherman, Peter understood that the massive fish catch was more than good luck. He saw it as a convincing sign that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Peter's response to the miracle of the fish catch was admitting to Jesus that he was not worthy to be in his presence, "*Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.*"

Jesus' response to Peter's heartfelt unworthiness was affirming: "*Do not be afraid; from now on, you will be catching men.*" Peter's life changed course with Christ's acceptance. He and the other men with him pulled their boats to shore and dramatically left everything to follow Jesus.

The examples of Isaiah, Paul, and Peter show how humility can crack open the heart to allow God's grace to flow into our lives, transforming and healing us of our brokenness and sin. Humility allows us to live and stay rooted in the truth before God and others without pretense, arrogance, or wallowing in pettiness.²

Pope Francis, in the opening line of his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, the *Joy of the Gospel*, reminds us:

The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew.³

Pope Francis has said humility is "...at the base of Christian life. [T]he gateway to all other virtues. ... [H]umility is the great antagonist of the most mortal of sins, namely pride."⁴ He

² Michael Casey, *A Guide to Living in the Truth* (Liguori, Missouri, Liguori/Triumph, 1999).

³ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican City: Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), 1.

⁴ Francis, *General Audience*, Wednesday, May 22, 2024, St. Peter's Square. Cf., General Audience catechesis on the virtues.

reminds us of Mary's example as a beautiful model of humble discipleship, open to whatever God asked of her.⁵

When reading the life of any saint, the common thread of humility emerges as a pivotal virtue in their lives.

St. Thomas Aquinas called humility the "Queen of the virtues." It is the foundational virtue for a genuine relationship with God, our loved ones, self-understanding, and how we look upon the world. Humility helps us to see more clearly with graceful insight.

A simple but profound prayer of humility, some attribute to St. Francis of Assisi captures the essence of the virtue: "Who are you, God, and who am I?" Another traditional prayer rooted in the spirit of humility is the Jesus prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner."

As the Church participates in National Marriage Week and the Jubilee of Hope, the importance of humility in the covenant of marriage is worth a bit of timely reflection. Of all the virtues that complement marital love, humility strengthens the marriage bond at its core. Humility encourages selfless generosity between spouses and makes a couple's marital love more resilient.

When spouses humbly offer love to each other, the daily familial bumps and bruises that happen heal more quickly. With each gesture of humility, whether in word or action, the pursuit of lasting love becomes more than just a fanciful idea; it finds a home where it is lived and felt. When spouses are humble before each other, love grows.

The Eucharist is an immense source of strength for all Christians seeking to live humbly. At each celebration of Christ's sacrificial love, we begin by acknowledging our sins and brokenness in the penitential rite and then are fed at the table of the Word of God and in the sacrament of his body and blood. Strengthened and nourished, we are blessed and sent forth as renewed disciples as his humble servants. When we gather, stand, and kneel to celebrate the Lord's love for us, we are saying by our presence, "Save me, Lord, because I cannot save myself."

The willingness to be humble before God and neighbor is never easy. Humility is a demanding virtue. Often, every fiber of our being resists being humble. The classic country song by Mac Davis hits the nail on the head, "O Lord, it is hard to be humble when you are perfect in every way."

How does a person grow in humility? Blessed Solanus Casey wrote *by being humiliated*. Blessed Casey's straightforward answer is insightful and almost funny because it is so true.

⁵ Ibid.

He wrote, "God knows we need humiliations whereby we can foster humility. Hence in His love, He never fails to provide occasions for each one to practice penance which means in other words to check self-conceit and, with God's help, to get somewhere in humility."⁶

To live a virtuous life is the call of every Christian. Humility is the keystone of all the virtues. May we all strive to live in the truth of who we are before God and each other as his humble people, imitating Jesus' selfless love, thinking of others before ourselves, and showing the world how to discover lasting love.

Summary Points:

- The readings from sacred scripture are bound by three powerful yet different examples of the virtue of humility.
- A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do the good.
- Humility is *not thinking little of oneself but of thinking of oneself very little*.
- The Prophet Isaiah, St. Paul, and St. Peter were humble before the Lord and converted and transformed by his grace.
- Humility allows us *to live and stay rooted in the truth*.
- It can crack open the heart to allow God's grace to flow into our lives.
- Humility is a pivotal and foundational virtue, the queen of virtues.
- Of all the virtues that complement marital love, humility strengthens the marriage bond at its core.
- When spouses are humble before each other, love grows.
- It is a demanding virtue and the keystone of all the virtues.
- Humility is a virtue needed for the world to discover lasting love.

⁶ Michael H. Crosby, *Thank God Ahead of Time: The Life and Spirituality of Solanus Casey* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Franciscan Media, 2009), 139.