

25th Sunday B - Knights of Columbus Board Meeting

Introduction

Today's Scripture readings speak about the virtue of humility. And that's not a bad thing, considering that we are about to welcome a Pope whose way of living the virtue of humility has won over many people. Perhaps we can take our cue from his motto which, in English means something like this: I've been chosen by you, O Lord, but I am wholly dependent on your mercy. If my high school Latin teacher (who is very much alive) heard that translation, he'd revoke my diploma, so please don't tell him about this homily!

Nonetheless, Pope Francis' motto tells us that he is convinced God has called him but that such a call is not an occasion for pride but rather for humility, for increased dependence on God's mercy. So I think Pope Francis would want us to spend a few minutes thinking and praying about humility as it appears in today's Scripture and then to apply this to our lives, and here's what I'd propose: that we briefly look at three images in today's Scripture that present humility and/or the lack thereof and then that we invite St. James in our second reading to interpret those images, and finally, that we apply all this to the question of how we, as the family of the Knights of Columbus, live our first principle, viz., charity. With any luck, we'll at least work up a good appetite for breakfast.

Three Images

So here goes, three images of humility or the lack thereof. Come to think of it there's only one image of humility in today's readings and that's the image of Christ himself who foretold his death on a Cross. The first reading from the Book of Wisdom and the rest of the Gospel passage that portrays the disciples as bickering about who is

the greatest are in fact anti-humility images.

So in let's place Christ in the center. Last week, you will remember that Peter acknowledged in faith that Jesus was (and is) the Messiah. Immediately thereafter Jesus predicted that he would suffer, die, and rise so as to bring about the forgiveness of sin. In today's Gospel, Jesus again foretells that he will suffer and die to redeem us. Here is Jesus, the Eternal Son, the sinless Lamb of God who is meek and humble of heart, who did not deem equality with God something to cling to, and who was ready to fulfill not his own will but the will of the Father who sent him. Jesus does not deny who he is or the uniquely momentous mission that is his. But he fulfills this mission without any trace of egoism. In his humility, He is the living image of the Father's utterly self-giving love.

Not as much can be said about the two images on either side of Jesus. On the left side are the folks we met in our first reading from the Book of Wisdom. They were the ones who couldn't stand the prophets who spoke for God. The prophets made them uncomfortable by exposing their wickedness. In their warped viewpoint, the prophets had a lot of effrontery, so much so that they had to be done away with. These folks are prototypical of those who would accuse and condemn Jesus - leaders who were whitened sepulchers. In their pride, they did not recognize the humility of Jesus, the Just One.

On the right side are the apostles ... the pre-Pentecost version, of course. Even in their pre-Pentecost stage, however, they were not Jesus' enemies but his friends. They are on the opposite side of those who sought to put Jesus to death. Nonetheless, at this point they were on a page from different from Jesus. Jesus had just finished predicting for a second time that he would suffer and die - and here they were debating among themselves who was the greatest. This discussion, by the way, must have been pretty upsetting to Peter whom Jesus had appointed as the leader of the Apostles. Whatever the case, they were way off base and Jesus didn't

hesitate to tell them so.

The Interpreter

Thus the three images: humility surrounded on each side by hubris. Let's see how St. James interprets all this in today's second reading. In a word, James helps us see who Jesus is, the image in the center. Jesus is not wise in the way the world accounts wisdom. Rather, he is "wisdom from above", God's wisdom in the flesh, and in all he said and did he was 'pure, peaceable, gentle, compliant, and full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity.' Those who participate in the life of Christ by taking part in the Word of God, by worshipping, and by growing in moral virtue likewise manifest in their words and deeds wisdom from above. Far from grasping for honors and riches, those who share in the life of Christ are pure, peaceful, merciful, and filled with the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

James has more to say about who are proud and grasping for honors and riches. They are not merely nice people out to improve their lot. Rather they are people who are spiritually disordered. They are at war with themselves and with those who stand in the way of their goals. Instead of being meek and humble of heart, they are covetous, envious, and murderous. Their prayer is not heard. Thus James interprets the panels to the right and left of Christ.

Application to the Knights of Columbus

Well, what does all this mean to us as the family of the Knights of Columbus? As I mentioned at the beginning of this homily, it has to do with how we practice the principle of charity and how we foster this principle in the jurisdictions we represent.

Our charity is legendary - both what we do as an Order and also what individual Knights contribute monetarily and in volunteer hours. Yet, for this charity to bear the good fruit of the Gospel, that is, for it to be a charity that evangelizes, it needs to

be practiced with the humility of Christ. Human nature not yet fully redeemed will assert itself again and again. Nonetheless, we must foster among ourselves and our brother Knights a robust humility that does not deny God given talent and does not shirk responsibility in the Order but recognizes our dependence on God's mercy and the injunction to defer to one another out of love for Christ. How much more clarion would be the witness of our charity without those rivalries that crop up from time to time, rivalries that are based on pride not on humility.

So, the heart of the charity we are called to practice is humility, a humility like that of Christ who came not to be served but to serve, indeed, to give his life as a ransom for many. The heart of the charity that we are called to practice should resemble the charity that was revealed on the face of Christ: a charity that is pure, peaceable, gentle, full of mercy and good fruits, without any trace of inconstancy or insincerity.

Conclusion

In the days ahead, Pope Francis will call us to open our hearts more widely to Christ. He will call us to imitate the One who is meek and mild, who clung not to his own prerogatives but who brought Redemption to the very fringes of human life and experience.

May we welcome the Pope by resolving with the grace of the Holy Spirit, to share through Word and Sacrament in the humility of Jesus! Vivat Jesus!