

Homily 4th Sunday Yr A: Humility: Boast Not in Oneself, but in the Lord

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"No one should boast before God. Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord."

These are the words of St. Paul in our second reading today, from First Corinthians.

Why should no one boast before God? Precisely because He is God, and we are His creatures.

We would not even exist if it were not for Him. He created all things, including us, and He maintains everything in being

What does it mean to boast in the Lord? It means that we should attribute to God, give Him credit, for any good we do, for any holiness we attain, knowing that it is all due to God's grace.

St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), used the motto for members of his order: *Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam* (To the Greater Glory of God). That is, we should do all things not for our own glory, but for the glory of God, for His greater glory, knowing that He is the Source of all graces and blessings we receive.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is our perfect example here. In her great prayer of praise to God, the *Magnificat*, which she spoke when she visited her cousin Elizabeth, she says this:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid."

If anyone had reason to boast about gifts and graces, it was Mary. But she did not boast of herself, but rather, she realized that any degree of holiness and splendor she possessed was freely given to her by God.

Why don't we always imitate Mary, and always give God the glory for anything we do, for all our accomplishments? Why are we always inclined to glorify

ourselves, and to *relish in* any praise we might receive from others? It is because of our sinful pride, which is due to our fallen human nature.

Humility is the great virtue which opposes, and is a remedy for, our sinful pride.

The Prophet Zephaniah, our first reading today, exhorts us to “*seek the Lord, all you humble, . . . Seek humility.*” He says that the Lord seeks a people “*humble and lowly.*”

In the Liturgy of the Hours today, daytime prayer, is Ps. 34, which begins with these words: “*I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise always on my lips; in the Lord my soul shall make its boast. The humble shall hear and be glad.*”

St. Paul in our second reading speaks of how “*God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no one might boast before God.*”

Yes, if we practice humility, God will be pleased with us and will exalt us – not only here on earth, but in Heaven.

That’s the message of Jesus today in Matthew’s Gospel, which is the beginning of the greatest sermon ever preached: the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes, which are a complement to the Ten Commandments, and teach us the most perfect way to imitate Jesus Christ.

Significantly, the first Beatitude is about humility: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*”

“Poor in spirit” does not mean to be lacking in holiness, but rather to be lowly in spirit; not proud and arrogant.

Humility – like holiness – attracts. We enjoy being in the company of a humble soul. No one likes being in the presence of a conceited, self-centered Person who always praises and draws attention to himself.

The humble will enjoy more glory, more happiness, greater beatitude, in Heaven because, as I've said, there God will reward them, exalt them.

The saints realized this. Our patroness, St. Therese, desired to be known as the "Little Flower" of God. She said, "*I am too little to have any vanity. . . . I prefer to acknowledge simply that 'He that is mighty has done great things to me'* (Lk. 1:49) (quoting here Mary's *Magnificat*); *and the greatest [thing God has done] is having shown me my littleness, my powerlessness for all good.*"

Another Carmelite Saint and Doctor of the Church, St. Teresa of Avila, said: "*There is more value in a little study of humility and in a single act of it than in all the knowledge in the world.*"

Having great intelligence and vast knowledge and can often be a source of pride. Yesterday was the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas, whom most agree had the greatest intellect of all the saints. (He is the patron saint of Catholic schools; hence this week is Catholic Schools Week).

Once, when someone praised his great intellect, he said that he drew all his knowledge from praying on his knees before the Crucifix.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton is regarded as the foundress of the Catholic school system in this country. (I used to pray at her tomb every week when I was in the seminary in Emmitsburg, MD). Mother Seton said: "*The gate of Heaven is very low; only the humble can enter it.*"

Finally, let us recall the words of Jesus Christ Himself: "*Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest for yourselves*" (Mt. 11:29). Yes, rest and peace here on earth, and eternal rest in the Kingdom.